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KILCORRAN

VOL. II

KILCORRAN

BY

THE HON. MRS. FETHERSTONHAUGH

"But none shall triumph a whole life through:
For death is one, and the fates are three"
The Triumph of Time

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II



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CLAY AND TAYLOR, BUNGAY



CONTENTS OF VOL. III.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	[illegible]	[illegible]
II.	"SIR, IT IS MY WILL"	[illegible]
III.	[illegible]	[illegible]
IV.	"A TRUTH [illegible]"	[illegible]
V.	[illegible]	[illegible]
VI.	"[illegible]"	[illegible]
VII.	[illegible]	[illegible]
VIII.	[illegible]	[illegible]
IX.	THE "[illegible]"	[illegible]
X.	[illegible]	[illegible]
XI.	"[illegible]"	[illegible]
XII.	"[illegible]"	[illegible]
XIII.	"[illegible]"	[illegible]

CLAY AND TAYLOR, BUNGAY

CONTENTS OF VOL. II.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	CRAVEN PLACE	1
II.	"IL Y A DE MA VIE"	33
III.	SOCIETY	49
IV.	"A TENIR PROMESSE VIENT DE NOBLESSE"	69
V.	BACHELOR QUARTERS	89
VI.	"FORTY MINUTES ON THE GRASS" ...	107
VII.	TRUE METAL	127
VIII.	DIVIDED	147
IX.	THE "BLUE DANUBE"	163
X.	DRUMMORE	181
XI.	"KITTANE'S" LAST FENCE	209
XII.	"CARN NA CUIMHNE"	227
XIII.	"JE ME TOURNE VERS L'OCCIDENT" ...	249


600056157U

KILCORRAN

VOL. II

The evening sun was shining on the great white mansion of the Lords of Connistoun, known as Craven Place, making its whole western side one blaze of fire, and giving to it the bright warm beauty which it usually so sadly lacked. Built high on a hill, and of light-coloured stone, with no patch of darker colour anywhere to relieve it,—it was so cold to the eye as to make one shudder. Though scattered about the park in which it stood were fine old trees enough, not one of them grew very near the house; and gaunt and bare stood the old pile in its huge ugliness, without even that truest of friends, the ivy, to hide its desolate nakedness.

"The old barrack looks as if it were on fire," thinks the owner of the said

mansion, as he rides leisurely across the park on his way home from hunting. "It's a pity that half of it can't be got rid of somehow, and even then it would be a bigger house than one wants!"

A cheery, kind-hearted man, of near forty, is the present Lord Connistoun, whose plain, good-tempered face is popular in all societies and amongst all classes, high or low. In tastes and pursuits he is a thorough old-fashioned English country gentleman, and a better sportsman "all round" could hardly exist. His brilliant shooting at ground game, or when driving grouse, goes far to establish his justly-earned reputation of being one of the quickest shots going; and the same quickness of eye has many a time, when hounds are running, found

a fair place for himself in some nasty fence, the apparently impenetrable nature of which was bringing confusion and consternation on the flower of the Grasshire chivalry.

A determined bachelor too is Lord Connistoun, much to the chagrin of his widowed old mother; and the efforts of all the many maidens, desirous of becoming Marchioness of Connistoun, have been all in vain as yet in shaking his determination. So the quiet, gentle old mother consoles herself with the thought that at least her only other son is going to give her a daughter-in-law whom she feels she can love with all her heart; for little as she has seen of Lillis Fane (whose mother was her earliest school-girl friend), still she has seen enough to know

that her son has chosen wisely and well in asking the little Irish maiden to be his wife.

The two brothers are singularly fond of one another; not so strange perhaps when considering that they are two only, but strange enough when the great difference between them both in health and strength, tastes and pursuits, is considered.

Ernest Craven's tall slight figure and pale grave face make a striking contrast to his brother; and one does not need to hear the occasional low cough or to notice the narrow, contracted chest, to feel sure that the strong good health of the elder brother is wanting in the younger. The high forehead and the dreamy look in the dark eyes tell of the student and

philosopher; but the whole face is almost too gentle for that of a man, and too full of sensitiveness to be a very happy one for itself.

"Has the brougham gone to the station for Miss Fane, Martingale?" inquires her future brother-in-law, as he jumps off his horse in the yard, giving the good grey a kindly pat on his quarters as the latter is led off.

"Miss Fane came by an earlier train, my Lord, and has been here about two hours," answers the stud groom.

"And the black mare?"

"She'll be here by the next train, I believe, my Lord."

"Dear little Lil! she'll brighten us up a bit, and do the old mother a world of

good," thinks Lord Connistoun as he wends his way into the house,—striding into the hall and laying his hat and whip on the table, with all the clatter inseparable from the true Briton's entrance amongst his Lares and Penates.

"I suppose Ernest is playing the devoted lover in the drawing-room," he mutters, as from force of habit he lays his hand on the door of the library, where his brother usually sits. But, no!—the devoted lover is at his accustomed post, in a large arm-chair drawn up to the window, with a small table close beside him covered with books and periodicals, and looking very much as if he had altogether forgotten the fact that his lady-love was probably requiring his services

in the drawing-room at that very moment, to hand her bread-and-butter at five-o'clock tea.

"What sport did you have, Con?" he asks, in his kind gentle voice, looking up from the pages of an engrossing article in the *Saturday Review* on "The Taking of Human Life considered as a Science."

"Oh! pretty good. At least, we'd a capital gallop in the morning; but somehow or other the scent failed this afternoon, and we did nothing after two o'clock. How's Lil?"

"Very well indeed," answers Lord Ernest. "I'll go up into the drawing-room with you and get a cup of tea, I think," he adds, rising—his brother's inquiry having suddenly brought the memory of his little lady-love before him,

of whom he is as fond as his absent, dreamy nature is likely to be of any living creature.

The drawing-room is large and immensely high, as are most of the rooms in Craven Place; and the only cheerful, bright spot in it is the huge fire roaring at the far end, before which Lady Connistoun and Lillis Fane are sitting, drinking their tea.

Lady Connistoun is a quiet, kindly, silver-haired old lady, like her second son in voice and manner, but possessing her eldest son's singularly strong expression of *bonhommie.*

Lil Fane has altered little in the last six months to all outward observation. The same bright frank manner is there, as she rises to greet her future brother-in-

law, and the same merry smile as of yore when she laughs at his old bachelor ways in making his tea. But let any one see Lil when sitting before the fire alone, or resting in some quiet corner listening to music, and they will see a look on her face as of one into whose soul the iron has entered very deeply,—a look which for six months past has never left her. After the night of the eventful ball at Corraghmore, life seemed to have been nothing but a painful dream, and all feeling and reality to have passed away out of it. For weeks Lil had struggled on against the daily deepening pain of past memories, and just when the girl's heart was almost failing her, rescue came in the shape of a sudden call on all her energies. A low, typhoid fever broke out in the

glen, and spread rapidly through all the towns and districts for many miles round, and when the bitter winter weather set in it brought in its train many a long, weary fight 'twixt life and death in the miserable cabins and hovels surrounding Shaughane.

Lil Fane worked amongst them all with the restless, unwearied energy of one who was not only actuated by charity towards her fellow-creatures, but also by a desperate wish to drown all thought. Day and night, in all weathers, was she at her post,—riding long distances for medicines and help, or to bring food to those who wanted nourishment,—sitting hour after hour by some wretched bedside where all hope was past, but where her presence was a sort of comfort to some

despairing mother or desolate wife; and many were the heart-felt thanks bestowed upon "the wee lady," and many a prayer went up to Heaven to ask for blessings on her head.

At last the violence of the fever abated, and the severity of the weather about the New Year seemed to sweep it away, though only too certainly did it also carry with it those who were still too delicate and feeble to fight through the terrible cold. Lil felt so great a longing for rest, and for a change to brighter scenes, that, when February came, and almost all traces of the fever had vanished, she had gladly accepted her future relatives' invitation to go and stay an indefinite time at Craven Place. Since the night of the ball at Corraghmore, Neal

Trench and herself had never crossed each other's paths, and voluntarily she had never spoken his name to any living soul. Once when she had stopped, in riding through Shaughane, to speak to fat old Mrs. Maguire respecting some children, relatives of the latter's, that were down with the fever, the old woman had said:

"Deed thin, Miss Lil, an' I may jist order the best of iverything for thim or for ony other of the poor sick craythurs about; Misther Trench wrote me word so himself jist. It's in England he is, did ye know?"

"No," answered Lil, longing to ride on, yet nervously afraid of doing so, lest the old lady should think it looked strange.

"'Deed I don't know what tuk him there, at all at all! But he called me into

the hall the marnin' afther the big ball at his honour's over yonder, and he looked as if he'd seen something quare jist, he was so wisht and weird like. An', 'Misthress Maguire,' says he, 'I'm goin' to England this blessed marnin,' says he, 'an' it'll be months before I come back again,' says he. An' whin I wrote an' tould him of the favur here, an' how the sick craythurs wanted soups an' jellies, an' that you was jist workin' night and day to help thim,—he only wrote that they was to have iverything they required, but sorra a word did the masther say of himself. An', Miss Lil, do ye know now——Holy Vargin! what a divil of a baste!" and Mrs. Maguire skipped hastily on one side in spite of her obesity, as "Kittane," who had had enough of stand-

ing in the cold, indulged in one or two violent plunges, and then cantered off home undeterred by her mistress, the latter feeling immensely relieved at the abrupt conclusion brought to Mrs. Maguire's anecdotes thereby.

"What sort of a passage did you have, Lil?" inquires her future husband, his dreamy eyes resting admiringly on her fair frank face and golden hair, and the neat figure set off by its tight-fitting, braided, black cashmere travelling-dress.

"Oh! pretty good I believe, Ernest, but mercifully for me I slept the whole time nearly, so was utterly oblivious to all sights and sounds reigning on board."

"You've brought the boy with your mare, haven't you?" asks Lord Connistoun.

"Yes, Pat Conolly has come with her. And, Con, I gave him lots of new clothes to make him look respectable, and several pairs of boots; do tell Martingale to see that he wears them, for I had such trouble with him at Liverpool this morning!"

"In what way?"

"Why, when we landed, I waited to see the mare taken off the steamer—and then there was very little time, so they told us, for her to catch the slow train she had to go by. Pat couldn't have ridden her through the streets, so fresh as she is, and in a side-saddle too, so I told him to lead her to the station and to go as fast as ever he could,—upon which, before all the people, he says: 'Miss Lil, may I make so bould as to take me boots aff?

I'se feared I'll niver go fast enough in thim to catch the train!'"

"What did you say?" asks Lord Connistoun, laughing.

"I said sternly, that he was on no account to think of such a thing, and I tried hard not to notice the grin of delight on the faces of an admiring crowd which stood round us; but twenty minutes afterwards, just as my cab turned into the station-gates, what did I see but 'Kittane' arriving, with Pat bare-footed running alongside of her at a jog trot, carrying his boots in his hand!"

"I'll be bound he'll arrive here presently under exactly the same circumstances," laughed Lord Connistoun.

"Oh! I do hope he won't, Con!

What will Martingale and all your smart men think of him ?"

"Never mind, Lil, it'll be dark by the time he gets here, my dear," put in old Lady Connistoun.

"Yes, mother, but one doesn't know when he may do it again any day," answered Lil in a vexed tone. "Con, may I speak to him when he comes this evening ?"

"Of course you may, and I'll tell them to let you know when he arrives. But I never yet saw the Irishman who couldn't adapt himself to circumstances, and you may depend upon it that he'll swagger more than any of them in about a week."

After an hour's chat over the fire, during which Ernest Craven quite forgot

the Saturday Review and its engrossing articles whilst listening to his little *fiancée's* merry words and gay laughter,—the dressing-bell rang, and Lil retired upstairs to the huge, old-fashioned bedroom allotted to her.

In truth it was a most formidable apartment! The size of the black oak four-poster in the middle, with a dragon of most ferocious aspect carved at every corner, was enough to quell the stoutest heart; and the walls of the room were covered with faded tapestry, portraying the Massacre of the Innocents, the Martyrdom of the Early Christians, and sundry other lively and exhilarating subjects of Ancient History. The only comforting thing in the room was the fire-place, which was as large and old-

fashioned as everything else, and the enormous fire roaring up the chimney made at least one end of the huge apartment look bright and cosy, as it lit up the figures on the tapestried walls and brought out in relief the carved cherubs decorating the old stone mantel-piece, all of whom rejoiced in most facetious expressions of countenance.

After Lil had finished dressing, and was leisurely crossing the hall to the drawing-room, the butler came and told her that "her groom had come in to speak to her," and accordingly in another minute Mr. Patrick Conolly was ushered into the hall.

"Well, Pat, so you've brought the mare here all right?" said Lil, scrutinizing his feet carefully, lest the crowning

item in his new toilette should be missing. But no, the boots were there, though looking suspiciously clean.

"'Deed thin, an' she niver was betther in all her life, Miss Lil,—an' she's tuk no harrm at all at all. But Miss Lil,—whisht now! I want to tell ye somethin'—" (and Pat advanced cautiously and glanced round lest other auditors should be too near), "deed an' me heart's jist intoirely bruk wid thim boots!"

"I can't help it, Pat," answered Lil severely, "you *must* wear them when you come to stay at a big house like this, you know! I hope you had them on when you arrived just now?" she added inquiringly.

"Well now, Miss Lil, sorra a loi I'll tell ye about it! I carried thim in me

hand until I got near the big gates, an' thin I jist sat down on the grass an' put thim on, — an' me soul on it! but they looked as clane an' as nate as if they'd niver left the shop at all!"

"They're likely to, if you never wear them! Well now mind, Pat, don't let me see you without them whilst I'm here, else I shall send you home at once and have young Micky Doolan over instead, to look after the mare."

"Is it Micky Doolan ye mane? Thin I'll jist tell ye, Miss Lil, that Micky Doolan wouldn't have so much as a rag left on his blessed body by the toime he got here, the craythur, let alone his boots! An' a purty sight that 'ud be! The likes o' him indeed! — Micky Doolan!"—and Pat's indignation almost

mastered him as he retired gracefully from his mistress's presence.

It is after dinner, and the little party of four are all in the drawing-room. Lillis Fane and her betrothed occupy a comfortable sofa near enough to the fire to feel its warmth, and yet far enough from the arm-chairs occupied by the two other members of the party, to enable them to talk unreservedly to each other when so inclined. Contrary to her expectation, she finds conversation with him an easier matter to herself than it ever was before. The realities of life which she has passed through of late have taught her to think more deeply of many matters which in the hey-day of her frolicsome childhood she had condemned as too learned and uninteresting for her.

And Ernest Craven, for the first time in his life, feels that in the wife he has chosen he will possess an earnest, clever companion, as well as the merry plaything whose mischievous brightness and careless gaiety had so taken the fancy of the quiet, absent-minded student.

They talk on together in low, confidential tones, and she tells him of her father, and the Corraghmores, and all else connected with her own home; of everything but one subject: of *that* name the girl cannot speak. But whilst he in his turn is recounting to her sundry incidents of the past few months which he thinks may interest her, Lil suddenly gives a violent start, and listens eagerly to the conversation going on between mother

and son, at the other side of the large open fire-place.

"Well, but how many people dine here altogether, mother, on Thursday?"

"Seventeen, my dear, for certain,—and eighteen if this young lady comes with Mr. and Mrs. Bellingham."

"Oh! I forgot to tell you, mother, that I saw Bellingham out hunting to-day, and the young lady *is* coming."

"Then we shall just be even numbers," says old Lady Connistoun in a tone of satisfaction, laying down her knitting and taking off her spectacles to give them a wipe. Then, as visions of a possible future daughter-in-law rise before her, she inquires with much interest:

"And what is the young lady's name, my dear?"

"Miss Airlie, mother."

"Is she tall and fair, with dark red hair and blue eyes?" asks Lil suddenly from the opposite corner.

"Yes; she was out to-day, riding about with old Bellingham, so I saw her. Do you know her, Lil?"

"I met her once at the Corraghmores," answers Lil, trying to speak naturally, "and liked her very much."

"Yes, I thought she looked a much better sort than most heiresses are. No! mother,—you needn't look at me as if you thought my hour had come at last! For first and foremost the young lady is already engaged to be married."

"To whom is she engaged, my dear?"

"To a man called Trench. A very good-looking, tall, dark fellow, whom I met in Paris once two years ago, and we knocked about a good deal together for some time. By the way, Tom Briarley told me that Trench is coming to stay with him at the end of this month for a few days, and bring some horses. They say he goes like the devil. We must ask him here, mother."

"Very well, my dear."

"How do I know this man Trench's name so well, I wonder, Con?" observes Lord Ernest.

"Probably met him in London, my dear fellow. Don't you remember him

last season, generally playing about with that pretty little gipsy-faced French woman, Madame de Rougepot, who ran away afterwards?"

"No, I don't think I do."

"Well, he's a very good fellow, and I'll find out when he comes to Briarley's and ask him on."

Had any one glanced at Lil Fane's face, which mercifully for her was thrown into semi-darkness by a thick lamp-shade, they would have seen it pale suddenly and the merry smile die away, whilst into her eyes there came an expression like that of some hunted animal which sees its looked-for sanctuary failing at the last!

Her heart sank as she heard her future brother-in-law give utterance to these hospitable intentions, and a desperate wish

came over her to pack up and go away that very night, sooner than run the risk of once more meeting the man who was so much and yet so little to her! But a few moments of calm reflection showed her that some weeks must for certain elapse before there could be any danger of her meeting Neal Trench again; and even should it by any chance come to pass that he were really coming to Craven Place, it would be easy to plead her father's health as an excuse for returning to Ireland at once. The very mention of his name, so long unheard and unspoken until now, seemed to set her heart beating wildly almost to suffocation; and it was with a great sense of relief, after a comment from Lady Connistoun on her paleness and probable weariness from so long a

journey, that she accepted the proposition to go to bed at once and get a good night's rest.

For hours after going up to her room, Lil sat before the fire there and watched its embers dying out one by one; and even when the growing chilliness of the room made her rise up shivering and go to her bed, far into the night could be heard the sounds of passionate, childish grief, mingled with the deep heart-broken sobs of a tortured woman's heart.

CHAPTER II.

"I have put my days and dreams out of mind,
Days that are over, dreams that are done.

* * * * *

I have hidden my soul out of sight, and said—
'Let none take pity upon thee, none
Comfort thy crying: for, lo, thou art dead;
Lie still now, safe out of sight of the sun.'"

THE TRIUMPH OF TIME.

CHAPTER II.

"IL Y A DE MA VIE."

IT was Thursday,—the day on which the previously discussed dinner-party was to take place, —and at six o'clock that evening Lillis Fane and Ernest Craven were sitting over the fire in the library, to have an hour's quiet talk before it was deemed necessary to don the garments suitable for that festive entertainment—a country dinner-party.

Lil had made her first appearance with hounds that morning; and, between the

quantity of advice bestowed upon her by her future brother-in-law and the astute pilotage of the latter's second horseman, had passed the ordeal most successfully. For, perfect horsewoman as the girl was in most respects, the difference between riding an animal quietly over fences alone, or steering the said animal across a big country, with a large crowd out,—was too great not to be a little trying at first to both herself and "Kittane." The latter, except for wild plunges on all and every available occasion, and a tendency to jump on whatever horse went at a fence in front of her, had on the whole conducted herself with great discretion, considering that it was the first time she had ever seen hounds. And from her lean head to her artistically squared tail, she

looked fit to throw many light-weight hunters into the shade even in Grasshire. Nor could any fault be found with the neat, well-cut, black habit of her rider; and Lil had sat up half the night before polishing her best hat with one of Lord Connistoun's silk pocket-handkerchiefs, lest its journey down from town should have ruffled its constitution or rubbed it up the wrong way.

Her future husband, who was no keen sportsman, and only took an interest in hunting because it was a favourite sport with those he cared for,—had been condemned to listen to a full, true, and particular account of the whole day's proceedings, given with much animation by his betrothed; but at last even that engrossing subject had been finished with, and

quieter and graver ones had taken its place.

Ernest Craven was lying back in his favourite arm-chair, with Lil sitting at his feet on the rug; and every now and then his hand passed gently and lovingly over the little golden head which leant against his knee, or stroked back the hair from the small pale face looking so strangely sad and wistful in the flickering firelight.

"Where's the mother, Lil?" asks Lord Ernest.

"Upstairs in her room, resting before she has to dress for dinner."

"How fond she is of you, little one! All the morning whilst you were out hunting with Con, she talked about nothing else but you and your ways."

"Poor boy! how bored you must have been," laughs his *fiancée.*

"And, Lil," continues Lord Ernest, gravely and tenderly, "she is very anxious to know when we are to be married,—and, dear, there is nothing in the wide world to wait for, — why should we wait?"

"Oh! not yet, Ernest; not yet! Give me a little more time,—I'm too young to marry yet!"

(Has it come so soon? And is there to be no respite for her?)

"Lil, dearest! why are you so afraid to trust yourself to me? Your life is a very sad and lonely one, darling, and I feel sure I could make it brighter and happier, if you would but let me try."

"But, Ernest, I don't feel old enough

and steady enough somehow yet; you mightn't like me when you got me, after all!" and Lil glances laughingly up at him,—but her hands, as she speaks, are twisted and untwisted with feverish force.

"I'm quite willing to chance that, Lil, if only you will be my wife now at once!"

There is a moment's reflection on the girl's part, and a resolution as quickly taken. The small thoroughbred head is lifted from his knee, and the fearless blue-grey eyes meet his bravely, as she says:

"Ernest, I will marry you when you like, if my doing so will make you happier, for you are the best man I ever knew. But I want to tell you first that I'm not as good as you think I am; that I learnt to care for some one else very, *very* much;

but that it's all past and gone now—and that I'll be everything in the world you wish me to be if you'll only show me how! I don't know whether I am right or wrong in telling you this; I only know that I will not allow you to think me better than I am, for I know you believe in me even as I believe in you."

"My little darling, I always have believed in you, and I always shall do so, and no vain shadows shall come between us! I honour you for your frank, brave honesty; but, dear one, I want no confessions or self-accusations. Perhaps I too should have many things to repent, were we both to be severely judged! No, darling,—I ask no questions of the past, for I know your upright, honourable nature, and I trust in it implicitly; all I

ask is that you will try to like me in the future, and that you will give me the right to stand between you and all temptations and sin and sorrow. Lil, will you marry me now, this spring?"

"Yes, Ernest," answers the girl quietly.

"Then I shall tell them all that I am to claim my little wife in two months' time from now! That will be about the middle of April, Lil, and then we can go abroad for the summer, if you would like that, dear?"

"Oh yes," responds Lil, her thoughts wandering, as she speaks, far back to a bright August day when she had sat by the sea-bound cliffs and listened to descriptions of foreign countries and worlds across the seas, told in the low musical

voice whose tones will haunt her to her dying day. Again rings in her ears the deep, moaning sound of the waves as they throw themselves savagely and hungrily on rock after rock far down below; and once more the hoarse roar of the Atlantic rollers, as one by one they fall back defeated before the calm, proud strength of the great cliffs towering above them, seems surging into her brain and sweeping away every other sound before it.

The clock on the chimney-piece strikes seven, and Lil rouses herself slowly and wearily from her flood of thoughts, to go up-stairs and prepare for dinner. Ernest Craven rises too, but before opening the door he turns suddenly towards her, and laying both hands on the girl's shoulders, says hurriedly:

"Lil, darling, you are not marrying me because you feel bound to, are you? You do like me a *little?*"

"Of course I do, you dear stupid boy!" and Lil tries to laugh, but the laugh dies away in a sob.

"God bless you, dear one!—you have given me a very great happiness!" and Ernest Craven bends forward and kisses his betrothed wife's forehead with a grave, loving reverence.

As they mount the stairs leading to the upper regions of the house, they meet old Lady Connistoun coming slowly down, ready dressed.

"Aren't you late, dears?" she inquires in her gentle old voice.

"I'm afraid we are," answers her son, "but we've been settling very important

affairs! Mother, Lil and I are going to be married the month after next."

"I'm very glad, dears—very, very glad!" and the good old soul wanders on her way down to the drawing-room in a state of overflowing happiness, her dim blue eyes brimming over with tears of joy to think that she will at least see *one* of her sons happily married and settled before her term of life be ended; and who knows but what she may yet, before she dies, have her children's children playing at her knee?

All the guests were assembled in the drawing-room by the time that Lillis Fane made her appearance there too, after a most hasty toilette. She was dressed in the same white dress that six months before had done duty for the ball at

Corraghmore, and had never been worn since; but some undefined feeling had made her dread the thought of wearing "all white" ever again, except on the day when she would have to wear it at the altar,—and now, large trails of shaded brown and claret-coloured leaves had taken the place of the acacia flowers, and the white trimming of the dress had been exchanged for some of deep claret velvet.

Almost all the occupants of the room were strangers to her, so she made her way across it to where Miss Airlie was sitting, talking to Lord Ernest.

"I was just asking after you, Miss Fane!" she exclaims, as they both shake hands warmly. "I am so glad to have the chance of meeting you again." And the nervous feeling which has risen in

Lil's heart anent this meeting, fades away like a shadow before Janet Airlie's blithe, honest smile, and the kindly look in her bonnie blue eyes.

The heiress is looking her best to-night, and the pale, creamy silk dress she wears becomes her admirably; but "she scarcely looks as bright and cheery as she did six months ago," thinks Lil to herself, when she watches Janet, as the latter talks to her neighbours at dinner, a few minutes later.



CHAPTER III.

"In yesterday's reach and tomorrow's,
Out of sight though they lie of to-day,
There have been and there yet shall be sorrows,
That smite not and bite not in play.
The life and the love thou despisest,
These hurt us indeed and in vain;
O wise among women, and wisest,—
Our Lady of Pain!"

DOLORES.

CHAPTER III

SOCIETY.

THANKS to her interesting position as *fiancée*, Miss Fane had been escorted in to dinner by her betrothed husband, and was therefore spared the exertion of stating what opinion she had formed on the weather that day, as would have been necessary to a stranger. Whilst Lord Ernest was struggling vainly to find any earthly subject in common that he could discuss with his neighbour on the other side, — a severe old lady of most austere

principles and forbidding manners,—Lil takes the opportunity of studying the outward appearance and apparent inner qualities of the rest of the dinner guests.

These appear to be of the description usually met with at country dinner-parties,—the greater half invited because they *must* be so by all the laws of courtesy and hospitality, the lesser half asked because they are desirable and popular, and every one likes to ask them.

Lord Connistoun's duties as host condemn him to a position only to be compared to that of "between Scylla and Charybdis," for on the left hand he is supported by the austere old lady aforesaid, whilst the seat on his right is nobly filled by the Dowager Countess of Crowder, a matron whose ample pro-

portions would quell the stoutest heart to look upon.

Altogether he is scarcely to be congratulated on the "bonnes fortunes" which this evening has brought him, and his cheery face is looking preternaturally grave as he struggles manfully against the exigencies of his situation.

On the farther side of her Ladyship of Crowder sits a large burly man, whose laugh seems to make the very glasses ring again. His weather-beaten face speaks of unceasing out-door exercise, whilst his heavy, powerful frame seems made to defy fatigue and exertion. Fortunate is it too in being so, for a more zealous, energetic Master of Hounds than Geoffry Topthorn could not be found all through the length and breadth of Old England.

He spares neither men, nor horses, nor money, to give his beloved "spotted darlings" the chance of retaining their time-honoured prestige as the best pack in the Shires,—and least of all does he spare himself! From the latest days of August to the earliest days of April his face is never missing from the covert side; and one glance at the countenances of his hounds when they hear the first sound of his voice, wheresoever it may be, go far to prove how well they have learnt to know him on their own flags at home, as well as when mounted and in their midst, he cheers them on to strain every nerve and energy in pursuit of their prey. A hard rider too is he, though his welter weight makes him go *through* his fences as much as *over* them; but no horses

know better than his do of how little use it would be trying to shirk or refuse,—or how little mercy will be given them should they be found wanting a t a critical moment.

Next to him at the table is one of the Ladies Porridge, of the noble house of Crowder, — her sister being *vis-à-vis* to him; the latter in charge of a feeble-minded young man of high lineage but low tastes, who is of opinion that there is no really *comme-il-faut* place in London for a man to go to except Cremorne,—and no conversation pleasing to the fair sex in general except what savours of that class of locality, interspersed with a flavour of the betting-ring.

Verily! the daughters of the Crowders belie their ancient line sadly in looks at

least, for their rough blowsy faces and coarse ungainly figures go far to sweep away all faith in "blue blood" telling!

Higher up sits a thin pale man of middle height, whose care-worn, world-weary face tells of a life hard lived and a youth hard spent. There is something in the feverish light of his restless dark eyes that seems to proclaim him a gambler to all the world,—ay! and justly too! For no man can sit from sunset to sunrise through all the varying chances of a night at *baccarat* or *écarté*, cooler and with more unshaken nerve than he; nor is there any man, again, whose careless saunter towards the Ring, when only the rashest plungers are daring to lay the odds which support the hottest favourite of a "bad day," rouses the same frantic eagerness of

reception from those "scum" of the earth within the iron rails, as can that of Bertie Graeme.

Even at this very moment, when he is apparently listening to the low tones of the beautiful little woman sitting beside him and lifting his glass up to the light to admire the rich deep colour of the Chateau Lafitte within it, his thoughts in reality have wandered far away to the critical state of his own resources at this moment, and are busily engaged in trying to solve the problem of how he is to "go on" until his next turn of luck comes!

Like a patch of sunshine amongst dark clouds stands out in his memory that day at the end of a fatal Houghton week, on which irremediable ruin had stared him in the face—when the equine pride of France

succumbed before the great, white-faced, chestnut Prince, on the Rowley Mile; and the latter once more retrieved the fallen fortunes of the "Upper Ten," and proved the justness of his claim to the reputation of being emphatically the "gentlemen's" horse. And: "Here's to bonnie Prince Charlie!" is the toast breathed silently by Bertie Graeme, as he drains the Chateau Lafitte to the memory of the grandest horse that ever lived!

The beautiful little brunette sitting next to him merits too a good deal more attention than he is giving her. Her blazing dark eyes and masses of black hair are simply magnificent, and would have made the fortune of a tragedy actress; but her short *nez retroussé* and widely smiling mouth entirely belie the tragic look of the

upper part of her face, and impart to the latter an odd appearance of belonging to different characters. Certainly comedy, not tragedy, would be Mrs. Clavering's *forte* were she an actress, for no one has ever seen her look grave, not even when she was arrayed in a widow's cap; and more than one aspiring suitor to the hand of the late Mr. Clavering's cheery relict, has occasion sadly to recollect the most musical but most heartfelt burst of laughter with which she had received his opening declaration of unalterable affection. With a kind heart (what there is of it!) and an excellent head, Laura Clavering is one of those women who invariably receive much honest love in life without an idea of returning it; and whatever may be the ups and downs of fortune of their less

favoured sisters, these generally contrive to marry the right man for themselves, and to live happy ever after.

Lady Connistoun is supported on one side by a pompous old county magnate, who irresistibly reminds one of the self-sufficient tom-cat in a certain Fairy Story of Hans Andersen's, which invariably said "we and the world;" and on the other, by a learned Professor, with half the alphabet in initials after his name, but whose linen scarcely keeps pace with his learning, judging by the total invisibility of anything like shirt-cuffs between his coat sleeve and his long thin hands. He can scarcely be said to have enjoyed his dinner, as food for his body is of minimum interest to him, and food for his mind he will only get when the ladies

retire from the dining-room, and he is enabled to take a chair at the other end of the table near to Ernest Craven, and thus at last find the only kindred soul with whom he can discuss the absorbing scientific subjects in which his soul delights.

"I suppose I must make my ninth ineffectual attempt to talk to this old woman on my right; mustn't I, Lil?" groans her betrothed, towards the end of dinner. "Do, for heaven's sake, suggest something for me to say to her."

"Tell her she's an old cat!"

"By George, Con looks very much as if *he* were going to do so! Certainly the gentlemen of Great Britain do not show to advantage when entertaining guests at their own dinner-table, and

flanked on either side by goodly matrons. I'm of opinion that dinner-parties ought to be cut up into innumerable small tables, and parties of four who suit each other should occupy each. But, Lil, do help me with this old woman! I've tried the weather, the war, the turnips, (though I don't believe there are any now!)—Gladstone's speech yesterday, and the railway accident to-day; what other subject *can* I try now?"

"Try children?"

"She's too old!"

"Try ferns?"

"I daren't! I hardly know them when I see them."

"Well, talk scandal to her?"

"Don't you think she's rather past that too?"

"Not a bit of it! She's just got to the right age to run away; it would add so much to the comfort of the proceeding to go off surrounded by air-cushions and lunch-baskets, — and to hear your *innamorato* murmuring sweet nothings through a respirator!"

"But I don't know any scandals myself," suggests Lord Ernest in a humble tone, as if ashamed of so grievous a confession.

"Then I don't know what's to be done. She doesn't look like a woman whom you could ask to play hunt the slipper with presently in the drawing-room, does she?—and I can't think of anything else. Supposing you don't speak to her any more at all, but talk to me instead?" And the speaker's face

looks so merry and bright, that Ernest Craven easily allows it to come between him and his proper duties for the rest of the time at dinner.

Meantime, Janet Airlie, whilst doing her best to prove an entertaining companion to Geoffry Topthorn (who has been her escort in to dinner), watches attentively Lillis Fane and Lord Ernest as they sit opposite to her. Whatever it is that her quick, searching blue eyes see, it does not seem to please her,—for a grave look settles on her sonsie face, and it is with an effort that she rouses herself to reply to her companion's remarks on the meet which she had that morning ridden to.

Bertie Graeme has awoke from his financial meditation, and is engaged

in earnest conversation with the little widow, whose brown eyes are dancing with mischief as she listens to the highly seasoned account of the very latest scandal in high life which he is giving her. That the said scandal concerns one of her own dearest friends is of small import to Laura Clavering, and the greatest amount of sympathy which this fact can draw from her is a pitying shrug of the shoulders and the words: "Poor Fanny! she always had too much of heart for this world?" And then she smiles and shows her white teeth, in happy consciousness that the latter accusation at least can never be brought home to herself.

The learned Professor has pushed his spectacles on to the top of his head and is

gesticulating wildly, in exasperation at his utter failure to make the fattest and stupidest of the Ladies Porridge understand the most recent experiments tried by science to investigate the interior economy of the moon and other heavenly bodies. At last Lady Crowder, who has been listening to the conversation between her austere *vis-à-vis* and their host, in which the former had tried hard to impress upon good-natured Con that every half-holiday which he begged on great occasions for the school-children, of his mother's pet school, was only assisting to sow seeds of early vice in that juvenile body,—is fortunate enough slowly to perceive that her hostess is watching her with that anxious and inquiring expression of countenance which denotes a move to the

sanctity of the drawing-room. And after three false starts, the stout Dowager succeeds in getting on to her legs and sailing majestically off to that apartment, followed by all the rest of the matrons and the maids. A look, as of a great weight having been taken off his mind, crosses Lord Connistoun's face, and whilst his brother goes down to the other end of the table and takes his mother's vacated chair next the Professor, he draws his own close to Geoffry Topthorn; and, being joined by Bertie Graeme, all three are soon immersed in an interesting discussion, of which only occasional stray sentences can be heard, such as:

"They tell me he's a goodish horse, you know."

"Don't you believe it, my dear fel-

low. He's a good fifteen minutes' horse, and that's all!"

"Well, but you'll allow that S— used to go well enough on him?"

"Yes, two seasons ago! But the horse is played out now. Why I saw him stop with the Pytchley one day myself; don't you remember, when they ran pretty fast from Stanford Hall towards Crick, and a lot of the fellows got into the brook?"

"My *dear* fellow! I remember the day perfectly, but S— was riding a big black horse then, not this brown one at all!"

"I'll take my oath that he was riding the brown horse with two white heels that day, that you're both talking about!"

"My dear *fellow*," etc. etc. etc.

CHAPTER IV.

"Truths unrevealed show dimly,
And pass with a fitful gleam;
The marks of the soul's great battles
Flit past like a misty dream;
Winding and changing quickly,
Clashing at times in strife,
Yet their bitterness all softened
By the spell of their Spirit-life."

ROOTS.

CHAPTER IV.

"A TENIR PROMESSE VIENT DE NOBLESSE."

MEANWHILE the ladies had scattered themselves in groups about the drawing-room, according as ages and tastes agreed. The austere female, as well as Lady Crowder and Mrs. Bellingham, were all three engaged in discussing the birth, death, and marriage statistics of all their mutual acquaintances. Mrs. Clavering struggled hard to glean a ray of intelligence from "the fattest of all" the Ladies' Porridge,—whilst gentle old Lady Connistoun tried her utmost to

talk London balls and gaieties with the other sister, a subject on which the former was about as conversant as would be a quiet, domestic old puss-cat with the happy hunting-grounds of some young cheetah!

"I was so pleased when Con said you were coming to dinner to-night," remarked Lil confidentially to Miss Airlie, as the two settled themselves on a small, comfortable sofa rather in the background.

"Were you? I was very pleased to come. But I didn't know of your being here until I was told this morning at the meet that you and 'Kittane' had made quite a sensation in these parts."

"Oh! were you out this morning too? I wonder why I never saw you!"

"Because I only went to covert and came straight home again, almost before the hounds moved off even. Miss Fane, I want to ask you a great favour, and that is whether I may call you 'Lil' simply? I am a good bit older than you, you know."

"Of course you may. Why scarcely any one except utter strangers would call me Miss Fane."

"Then you don't consider me quite an utter stranger, I am glad to infer from that remark!"

"No, indeed I don't." And Lil laughed in her heart at the idea of Neal Trench's wife being no more to her than any ordinary acquaintance!

"Well then, do tell me when you are going to be married, Lil."

"In two months' time, I believe."

"So soon as that!" and Janet's eyebrows almost met as she pondered some deep thought. "I have often wondered where marriages really are made up. It can't be in heaven, else we should never make such endless mistakes on earth!" she added bitterly.

"I think it's just chance, don't you?" answered Lil placidly. "At least it must have been that alone which made Ernest want to marry me, I should think!"

"And what made you want to marry him, dear?"

"Oh! I had never seen any one but him, so of course I liked him better than almost all the world."

"Poor child!" murmured Janet Airlie under her breath, whose maturer know-

ledge of life taught her how much of future danger lay in this frankly spoken fact.

"And I am quite sure that I shall be as happy as the heroine of an old story-book," continued Lil gaily, conscious that her companion's eyes were reading her face with a grave intentness. "You see I might have fallen in love with a very poor man, and that would never have done, because I was not fitted for that."

"Why not? I should have thought that you were."

"No,—Shusy (that's our old servant at home) says that any one who carves a loin of mutton lengthways as if it were a saddle, like I do, instead of hacking off chops, can't be economical and oughtn't

to marry a poor man," returned Lil gravely.

"Well, that's a practical argument against it, certainly."

"And I could never have married an Irish squireen, with a powerful brogue, and no curl to his hat-brim at the side!"

"Is the latter a *sine qua non* for any one to possess, who wishes to rank high in your estimation!"

"Yes, indeed it is; I've only learnt to really be a judge of hats since I came to England, but now a bad one gives me quite a shock. And I like a man's hat and top-boots to look as if he had sat up all night with them."

"I almost believe some men would!" laughed Janet. "But, Lil, tell me, are

you going to live here after you are married?"

"All the winter we shall, so Ernest says, but in the spring we're to have a small house of our own in London, and then the summer and autumn we shall chiefly be in Ireland, at the River House."

There came a silence. Janet Airlie sat playing idly with her large white fan, whilst her thoughts wandered far away into the future. Lillis Fane's, on the contrary, were anxiously intent upon the present, wondering nervously whether Miss Airlie would notice the omission of one person's name only, amongst those of all the mutual friends they had discussed. Her proud little heart beat high at the very thought, and hurriedly did she

determine to run no risk of being misunderstood on that subject, but to force herself then and there to say the name which had so long remained unspoken, save in her thoughts.

"Have you seen Neal Trench lately?" she asked quietly.

Miss Airlie started. "No, I haven't; but I was just thinking of him then."

"Where is he now?"

"In London, I believe; or hunting. He has kept his horses at Leighton for the last two months, since he came back from abroad."

"Had he been abroad? I did not know."

"Yes, he went away last October, and returned at the end of the year."

"And now you must tell me when *you* also are going to be married?" said Lil, trying to keep the cheerful ring in her voice which it is such torture to maintain before others sometimes."

"I'm not going to be married at all, dear," answered Miss Airlie quietly. "I broke off my engagement more than six weeks ago, as soon as I could,—I mean as soon as Neal Trench had returned to England."

"Not really?" exclaimed Lil, in utter astonishment. And though her inborn tact prevented her from asking any questions, the girl's eyes sought those of her companion wistfully and anxiously.

"I wanted to tell you about it, Lil, if you will listen patiently to a history of

the usual, old mistake. You see, I knew so little of Neal Trench when I said I would marry him, and he knew still less of me. He does not know me now, and never will, but the few weeks we were together taught me to know him. I learnt to know that his wild, changeable, reckless nature would never keep true to any person or thing, until the time came when he would perforce have to surrender his heart and soul into some one woman's keeping, for very love of her alone; and I learnt also to know that I was *not* that woman, and never could be. He was always kind, and loving, and courteous to me, but I am worth more than that. And I will never marry until I can get what I want, the real *true* love of

him who asks me to be his wife. Don't you think I'm right, Lil?"

"No! I think a promise is a promise, and a word should never be broken!"

"You speak as a child," said Janet hastily. "Is it better to sacrifice all one's happiness in life and that of others too, perhaps, for the sake of a promise rashly given? No, that may be chivalry but it is not common sense! You are younger than I, and don't know as well as I do the awful misery that comes of marrying a man when you don't feel that in him alone rests the 'all in all' of your life!"

The sudden, deadly paleness of her companion's face makes Janet Airlie pause, and her generous woman's heart springs to her lips as she says:

"Lil, I have told you all this because I feared that perhaps you too were marrying for the sake of a hasty promise given when you were even more of a child than you are now, and before you had seen any man who was capable of really winning such a heart as yours. If it is so, and if that man has dawned upon your life at last, oh! *do* listen to what I say, even though it were almost too late! What life could be more hopelessly sad than that of a woman married to one man, and knowing in her heart that she loves another more?"

"She could live down the weakness," answers Lil, with her dauntless eyes looking straight into those of her friend.

"Ay! and at what a price!" exclaims Janet Airlie bitterly. "It is

struggles such as those which make women saddened and world-weary before their time! Forgive me, dear, for speaking, but I hoped I might perhaps have saved your life's happiness and another's too."

"Miss Airlie," says Lil, speaking calmly and proudly, "I am more grateful to you than I can say, but don't ever say this again. I have promised to be Ernest Craven's wife, and he has agreed to take me with all my faults on my head, and no power on earth shall make me break my word when once given."

"You'll sacrifice all your happiness on earth for a quixotic promise!"

"So be it," answers Lillis Fane calmly.

The entrance of the gentlemen from

the dining-room put an end to the conversation, for Lil, privately requested by her future brother-in-law "to air the piano for her betters," at once sat down to sing any and all of the many songs called for.

Janet Airlie watched her with every moment growing respect and admiration, as she saw the girl sing song after song courteously and untiringly, though the deathly paleness of her face bore witness to the struggle for calmness and forgetfulness going on within her soul.

Miss Airlie looked across at Ernest Craven to see if he too would notice the weary little white face of his betrothed, and interfere to prevent her further torture, — but gave an almost imper-

ceptible shrug of the shoulders as she watched the absent, dreamy look on his face, and the rapt attention which he was giving to some hypothetical idea laid down by the worthy Professor.

When the hour came for the departure of all Lord Connistoun's guests, Janet Airlie clasped Lil's hand tight and whispered:

"I almost believe you are right, Lil, but I could not do it!"

There was no answer from Lillis Fane, but the great grey eyes looked so bravely and sadly into the blue ones, that involuntarily bonnie Janet Airlie bent over the little pale face and kissed it, with the low words:

"God bless you, dear, and send you real happiness some day!"

Till late into that night Lil paced restless up and down her huge, forlorn room, trying to drown the words that seemed ringing every moment in her ears. Neal was free! Free to marry where he would and whom he liked, and she alone was bound! But was she so bound? Was Miss Airlie right when she had said that such promises were quixotic, but not sense? Ernest Craven's words spoken that afternoon rose up before her: "I know your upright, honourable nature, and I trust implicitly to that!" And the girl bowed her head down upon her hands and prayed that the bitterness of the temptation might pass from her now and for ever, and, let fate bring

what it liked, that she might only be strong enough to remember one thing: before love, happiness, and peace on earth, should rank—"barren honour."



CHAPTER V.

"In the daytime thy voice shall go through him,
In his dreams he shall feel thee and ache;
Thou shalt kindle by night and subdue him
Asleep and awake."

DOLORES.

CHAPTER V.

BACHELOR QUARTERS.

FOUR o'clock on the afternoon of a raw cold day in February, and the fast Midland express had got under way from St. Pancras station, and was speeding on its journey northwards. One of the compartments in the train had for sole occupant a tall man enveloped from top to toe in a huge fur-lined great-coat, the collar of which he pulled up round his chin with a shiver, revealing in so doing the dark handsome face of Neal Trench.

The last six months had left their mark upon it, for it seemed thinner and deeper lined than of old, and there was a haggard, reckless look in the eyes, which told of an unquiet spirit within. Neither had these months apparently improved his temper either, judging by the hearty condemnations which accompanied cigarette after cigarette as they followed each other in a succession of flying leaps out of window, in return for their obstinate determination not to "draw."

At last, having found one to his satisfaction, he leant back in his corner, and, whilst filling the compartment with wreaths of pale blue smoke, shut his eyes and indulged in the one luxury which every living soul, be he beggar

or prince, can call his own—day-dreams *ad libitum*.

First, as was natural, his thoughts reverted to certain new pairs of top-boots, even then sitting in a box under the seat of the carriage, and a grievous misgiving as to the too probable discomfort of the same, mingled with a deep regret that he had not simply had new tops put on his old boots instead, shake his soul to its foundations. But a glance out of window dispelled this sad thought, comprehending as it did an uninterrupted view of large, green, ridge-and-furrow fields intersected by strong thorn fences, with here and there the white line along them telling of an "oxer," and nothing but grass on all sides,—grass everywhere.

"By George, what a grand bit of country this is!" he murmured enthusiastically, and fell to wondering whether he had been right after all in buying that black horse last week, which he feared was too small not to tire under his weight over a big country.

"I hate a black horse too! Beastly colour!" said Mr. Trench aggrievedly to himself, whereupon for punishment his thoughts immediately reverted to *one* animal of that same colour, and the heavy frown that settled on his face testified to the pain which the remembrance brought him. For during all his travels in far lands, and during the often ill-spent reckless hours of the last few months, the memory of a little frank, fearless face had

always risen between him and the madness that seemed to drive him downwards with giant strength. And many a time when days and nights of unceasing restless excitement had temporally succeeded in driving the thought of his little lost love out of his heart, a gay valse tune, or some fresh, heather-scented breeze, would bring the past up once more before him; the memory of its few short hours of happiness only serving to embitter still more the despairing sorrow that followed after.

Where was she? what doing? he wondered! And then as the letter forwarded to him, from his old house-keeper, telling of the fever at Shaughane, came into his mind, a ghastly fear crossed it that perhaps Lillis Fane too had caught

the fell disease whilst nursing others, and had sickened and died. But an instant's reflection taught him that he must have heard it, had such been the case, especially as he had seen the Corraghmores and other mutual friends frequently in town. Of Janet he had seldom thought, since the day when she had broken off their mutual engagement by a kind, sensible, friendly letter, putting forward arguments in defence of her decision, which he could not well gainsay. But when he *did* think of her, it was with the loving respect with which a man thinks of a woman who has been honest and true to her own self-respect as well as to himself, and who has not hesitated in deciding to remain "friends only," when the impossibility of

their ever being more to each other had come home to both.

Later on the same day, Neal Trench was sitting over the fire with his friend and host, Tom Briarley, in the comfortable smoking-room of the latter's bachelor house.

Honest Tom was an excellent specimen of a bluff, prosaic Briton, and, though he and his guest had nothing in common but their love of sport, since his earliest school-boy days he had always cherished a great respect for Neal Trench's superior brilliancy and cleverness, and a strong liking for the true gentleman's heart, which no time nor tide could change.

"So you think to-morrow's the day to have one's best horses out, do you,

Tom?" inquired Neal, taking the cigar out of his mouth as he spoke, and turning towards his companion.

The latter did *not* remove the meerschaum pipe that was between his lips, the bronzed tint of which augured well for its ultimate "colouring," and simply nodded his head with an unintelligible grunt of assent.

"How far is it to covert?" pursued Neal.

"Six miles. They meet at Queenly Cross Roads, in the best bit of their country."

"That's all right. I shall ride one of my horses on to covert, as I've no hack."

"Where did you get that big bay horse with the white heels, Trench, that

I was very much taken with when I took a look at your horses this afternoon?"

"Bought him in Ireland as a four-year-old, and have had him ever since. I'm sorry to say he's getting on in age now."

"Oh! is that the horse I can remember as a young one, overpowering your second horseman one day out with the Baron's, and jumping a very big gate? 'St. Julien' I think you called him?"

"Yes, that's 'St. Julien,' and a good honest horse he is, though he catches hold a bit still."

"He's just the stamp for this country."

"Does Geoffry Topthorn go as well as ever? And Connistoun?"

"Quite! both of them."

"And the hard-riding Miss Breast-plates, are they to the fore still?"

"That they are, my dear fellow, and a million of women out besides of all sorts and sizes!"

"Oh! Lord!" groaned Neal Trench, to whom this intimation meant too probably having his best horse kicked and the small of his own back liberally jumped on. "How I do hate women out hunting unless they can ride, and I'm not sure then that I wouldn't quite as soon they stayed at home."

"I'd a deal *sooner*," growled honest Tom. But his conscience smote him at this wholesale condemnation of the fair sex, and he added: "There's a very nice little girl out now, though, from the other

side of the country, who rides like the devil, and is thunderingly well-mounted too!"

"Is there?" answered Neal vaguely, with that beautiful indifference which characterises human beings when unconsciously sitting on a powder-magazine.

"Yes, she follows old Con right well, and there are not many women who'd do that."

But Neal Trench is absorbed in some paragraph in a sporting-paper which is lying on his lap, and his companion's words pass unheard and unheeded.

"Trench, when does your wedding come off?" asked Tom Briarley after a pause. "I must be getting my present ready."

"Haven't you heard then that my engagement is all off?" inquired Neal in surprise.

"No! indeed I haven't. I'm awfully sorry, my dear fellow,—wouldn't have said it for the world!" and Tom Briarley's bluff red face grew redder with consternation.

"There's nothing to be sorry about, Tom. Miss Airlie wished to break it off, so of course it was so done. I'm not broken-hearted, if that's what you mean, though I shall always maintain that the man who marries Janet Airlie will be a very lucky beggar."

Tom Briarley racked his brains vainly to think of some sympathising and consolatory observation which he might offer

on the occasion, but only succeeded in giving vent to a laconic remark from the very bottom of his heart:

"Women are the devil."

"No! they're not, Tom—at least, not all of them. I've seen one or two very near akin to angels unless I'm much mistaken."

"*I* haven't," answered the unbelieving Thomas firmly. "They're always either too true to be good, or too good to be true!"

"I'm afraid you've come across some bad specimens in the course of your chequered career, Tom. But you always had a holy horror of anything in the shape of petticoats, I remember."

"That's why you see me at six-and-

thirty with an easy conscience, an unshaken digestion, and an unblemished heart!"

"And the devil's own nerve, you might add! Well, I'll grant that there's a deal in what you say, but you'll change your mind some day, and I shall yet live to see a Mrs. Tom and a lot of little Toms running riot over these snug bachelor quarters of yours."

"No! that you won't, Trench. Why on earth should I marry if I don't want to? Now it's different for *you*. That grand old castle of yours doesn't look natural without a woman to reign over it, or a son and heir to inherit it in the future."

Black as night grew Neal Trench's face, and a savage curse broke from him,

making Tom Briarley start and nearly break his beloved meerschaum pipe in his surprise. And a look of bewildered dismay spread over his rubicund countenance, as his companion added in a deep, harsh tone of concentrated feeling:

"No woman will ever reign at Shaughane, nor will any child of mine inherit it after me, so help me Heaven!"

Honest Tom stared blankly into the embers of the wood-fire, realizing that a wondrous change must have come over the careless, merry comrade of his school-boy days; and great was the relief to his mind when the latter said in his usual tone of voice, a few moments later:

"What sort of sport had you in Scotland last year, Tom?" which interesting topic carried them on to bed-time.



CHAPTER VI.

"Hard on his track o'er the open, and facing
The cream of the country, the pick of the chase,
Mute as a dream his pursuers are racing,
Silence you know 's the criterion of pace."

WHYTE MELVILLE.

CHAPTER VI.

"FORTY MINUTES ON THE GRASS."

IT is a dull, still February day, but the old sign-post at Queenly Cross Roads is looking down on a gay, stirring scene this early spring morning. First arrive a crowd of second horsemen, a large enough body in themselves to constitute the "field" in a provincial country. Secondly come the sporting farmers of the district, most of them, by their own appearance and that of their mounts, doing justice to the assertion that were we in want of a brigade of

cavalry such as followed Prince Rupert of old, we need only to go amongst the fox-hunting farmers of Great Britain to find it! Thirdly come the carriages of every description, from a Victoria with its well-bred stepper, to Bill Smith's market-cart drawn by that worthy's least prolific brood-mare. And threading their way daintily between the medley of equestrians, pedestrians, and vehicles, come the hounds, with Geoffry Topthorn in their midst, the latter mounted on a powerful iron-grey horse, whose colour betrays his youthful years, but whose solemn, sensible countenance speaks for his premature cleverness as a hunter. Lastly, but not least, come a concourse of fastly-driven dog-carts and broughams, rattling along at a pace which surely Peters or Holland

could never have expected those discreet vehicles would have been called upon to do. Also a perfect regiment of smoking hacks are led away by the covert-boys, as man after man swings himself on to his first horse, with, in some cases, much struggling with refractory stirrup-leathers, the constant alteration of which testify strongly to the fluctuating nerve of their owners.

Lord Connistoun drives up in a mail-phaeton drawn by a pair of strong, useful roans, and Lil Fane, who is sitting by his side, glances anxiously from side to side, searching for the well-known form of "Kittane" in the crowd.

As she settles herself in the saddle, and sees to the pulling down of her habit and other trifles necessary to the neatness of

any woman's appearance on horse-back, she is accosted clamorously by the two Miss Breastplates in a breath:

"So glad to see you out, dear!"

"How well the black mare looks!"

"Isn't she rather hot with hounds?"

"I do hope you won't get a fall, dear!"

Bitterly at this moment do the Miss Breastplates envy Lil the possession of "Kittane," who is playing good-temperedly with her bit and looking the very beau-ideal of a light-weight hunter. The white-legged old chestnut, with legs like animated bolsters, ridden by the eldest Miss Breastplate, and the grey, who has grown *very* white in the service of the family, carrying the youngest, are both

good hunters enough in a way, but no more to be compared to "Kittane" than is a *passé* matron to a young beauty in her second season. And envyingly do both the sisters reflect on the complimentary terms in which the local papers have for the last few weeks commented on "the lady from Ireland on the little black mare," for to be mentioned in print is the deep, but hitherto unsatisfied ambition of these hard-riding damsels.

So great is the crowd, that Neal Trench is forced for a short time to remain at that end of it at which he first arrives, and the hounds have found in a small gorse covert almost adjoining the road, and are streaming out of the lower side of it, before he has come across

one half of the enormous field which is out.

Being almost left behind as the pack steals noiselessly away on the far side of a huge hedgerow, Neal's next five minutes are fully occupied in trying to make up his lost ground and get on terms with the hounds. Fortunately for him, the latter hang a little before they really begin to run, owing to a flock of sheep crossing the line at first, and slowly but surely does "St. Julien's" great stride tell—the turn of almost racing speed which the old horse possesses bringing them both up to the front rank by the time that the third big ridge-and-furrow field is crossed.

Neal takes a hurried glance at those riding nearest to him. On the left are the Master, Tom Briarley, and three or

four men whose names he does not know; on the right are two or three farmers and the first whip; and a little further off is Lord Connistoun on his well-known grey, whilst riding close behind him is a lady on a small but powerful black hunter.

So far from his thoughts is any idea of meeting Lillis Fane, and so unaccustomed is he to seeing her in a dark-coloured hunting-habit and a tall hat, that for the moment he does not recognize her. And yet a vague idea takes possession of him that he knows the look of the horse, and involuntarily he watches the latter as its rider steadies it to jump the fence at the end of the field, over which Lord Connistoun has just disappeared. There is no mistaking the mad

plunge, followed by wild snatches at the bridle, as the black hunter aforesaid rushes determinedly at the fence, and leaves it behind in one great, swinging, cat-like jump.

"By the powers! it's 'Kittane'!" exclaims Mr. Trench, as he also prepares to negotiate the obstacle at his own place lower down.

Such is the power that the love of the chase holds over most minds, that for the time being even Lil Fane is almost forgotten,—though were any one to have asked Neal afterwards what had been the principal features in the run as far as he saw, he would, if truly speaking, unhesitatingly have answered: Lord Connistoun on his grey horse, and the

little figure on the black mare always close behind him.

The fine old fox found that morning in Queenly Gorse had travelled many a mile and far before his nocturnal wanderings had brought him to that favoured spot,—and stoutly and bravely did he now prepare to face the many long and weary miles back again which lay between him and the strong earths in the far-off shades of Deepdene Wood, where he was bred. Hot and fast on his track tear the "spotted darlings" of Geoffry Topthorn's heart, and though the latter never takes his anxious eyes off them, still he exemplifies the theory that "silence is the criterion of pace," as any chance of their being over-

ridden becomes every moment more impossible.

Thirty minutes have passed, and the stout old fox still holds bravely on. Twice has he been headed, but each time has he turned again and made for the same point as before.

These "thirty minutes on the grass" have told a tale, and many a good horse is sobbing and rolling from distress, and many a rider scans the horizon anxiously and vainly for that cheering sight, a second horse!

"For the fences run strong in the Leicestershire vale,
And there's bellows to mend and a lengthening tail,
With a 'Forward Away' in the morning!"

But the line has been too straight a one

for any hope of such luxuries as second horses, and speed and stamina alone will enable any steed now to see the end of one of the most brilliant gallops of the season.

The strength of the line ridden over has nearly enabled the hounds to run clean away from the horses, and the severity of the pace has told terribly on most of the latter, especially on Geoffry Topthorn's iron-grey; and the Master has to put all his knowledge of the country into requisition to keep his place without asking his young one to jump more fences than can possibly be helped. "St. Julien" is going strong and well, so are three other horses in the same field with him, notable amongst them being a gigantic black horse carry-

ing almost more than a welter weight. Lord Connistoun's grey is labouring along under difficulties; already has he begun to jump short, and "give me time!" is his owner's pathetic appeal at each fence to his future sister-in-law,—whose mare, on the contrary, is jumping rasher and wilder as she gets to feel more beat.

There's a loud crash a little to the left, and one of the "flyers of the hunt" is to be seen lying where he fell, too blown to rise, whilst his happy possessor has scrambled on to his legs and looks ruefully after the disappearing sportsmen in front of him.

A thrusting light-weight, the flower of a provincial hunt, finds that the timber in the "shires" is neither of a giving nor

forgiving nature, as his thoroughbred ex-chaser takes the liberty of rashly hitting the top rail with its knees, and they both roll over each other in a complicated heap on the far side.

The field by this time is stretched out in a tail that is almost miles in length, and those who occupy the undignified position of last, anyhow reap the advantage of finding the fences so broken and smashed that a child's pony could almost get over them.

Deepdene Wood is in view now, and as if the sight of his home gives fresh heart to the good old fox and lends endurance to his failing limbs, he gallops on untiringly — though his crisp fur is now dark and stained, and the white

tip to his brush looks draggled and dirty enough.

Four more fields are crossed, three of which are luckily provided with bridle-gates, and the hounds are running in view at last, as the fox struggles up the last rise to the outskirts of the wood.

"Have a care! it's a double!" shouts back Lord Connistoun, as his horse blunders heavily on to his head over the last fence, sending his Lordship's feet out of his stirrups and his hat over his eyes.

"What a grand little mare that is!" he adds, as "Kittane," jumping bigger and stronger than ever, clears the whole thing without an effort, and lands safely beside him.

The gallant old fox sees the friendly shades of his wooded home close in front

of him now, and though a chorus of angry voices are close on his track, and already the leading couple of hounds are racing to cut him off, he makes one more brave struggle for his life, a struggle which is crowned with success. For as the pack comes crashing into the covert, shaking the hazels and brambles like a forest in a storm, old Reynard reaches that sanctuary, the hope of which has kept his heart up all along, and disappears into an earth, dug out by his own black pads under the root of a tree, and which, communicating as it does with half a hundred other earths, enables him to set all "digging out" arrangements at defiance.

But sadly did the fair vixens of Deepdene Wood bemoan the draggled and

woe-begone appearance of their lord and master, as he sat up in the moonlight and picked his fur that night. And graver looked their foxy faces, and a shudder ran through their vulpine hearts, as they listened to the tale of how Geoffry Topthorn's "little ladies" had so nearly done to death the grandest old fox in all the country round.

"Whoo—oop!" rings out in the Master's well-known voice, and sobbing horses are brought to a standstill (easily enough!), whilst on every side pour forth ecstatic comments on the past gallop, mingled with the usual excellent reasons for "not having been in it" given by those who arrive late upon the scene.

Five-and-forty minutes over the biggest line in Grasshire, with scarce a single

check, and at a right merry pace throughout, is not a thing to be got every day; and fortunate indeed are the few who own horses fast enough and stout enough to retain their pride of place to the end. Many an aspiring sportsman had "met his friend" ere half the distance was covered, and many a weary, jaded steed stopped dead before the sheltering woods of Deepdene could cast a friendly shade over the discomfiture which made their owners feel sadder and wiser men, as they jogged slowly and regretfully homewards.



CHAPTER VII.

"You have chosen and clung to the chance they sent you,—
Life sweet as perfume and pure as prayer—
But will it not one day in Heaven repent you?
Will they solace you wholly, the days that were?
Will you lift up your eyes between sadness and bliss,
Meet mine, and see where the great love is,
And tremble and turn and be changed? Content you;
The gate is strait; I shall not be there."

THE TRIUMPH OF TIME.

CHAPTER VII.

TRUE METAL.

"KITTANE" was lashing out restlessly and uneasily after her gallop, and her mistress walked her quietly down a ride in the wood to keep her away from the hounds. Suddenly the tramp of another horse is heard behind, and the little mare lays her ears back peevishly as "St. Julien" brushes against her and is drawn up alongside.

"How do you do, Lil? I'm very glad to see you again!" says a well-

remembered voice, and Lillis Fane looks very much as if she had seen the ghost of past years appearing before her, as she turns to face Neal Trench with a desperate struggle for composure.

"How well the mare carries you over this country," he adds, hurriedly pursuing any irrelevant subject.

"Yes, doesn't she?" stammers poor Lil vaguely, who between fatigue and over-excitement, and the shock of meeting him once more, is altogether very near bursting into tears.

"We've had a good gallop, haven't we?" says Neal Trench, trying to speak easily. "I don't think I ever saw a much better."

"It's the best run *I* ever saw in my life. But then I have only seen very few."

"You are staying at Connistoun's, I suppose?"

"Yes; and you?"

"At Tom Briarley's; quite the other side of the country to Craven Place."

"It's very pretty about here, don't you think?" hazards Lil at random.

"Can't say I agree with you!"

"Oh! I think a grass country is so picturesque!" exclaims Lil, whose common sense is obviously deserting her under the stress of circumstances.

"What a good-looking horse that is," she continues, to break the silence which is getting awkward. "What do you call him?"

"St. Julien."

"Oh! that's the horse I've heard you—" speak of, she had meant to say;

but the thought flashes over her that by no chance word even must she allude to the days gone by.

"Why do you speak to me as if we were utter strangers to each other?" bursts out Mr. Trench angrily.

"Because we *must* be strangers to each other, Neal, for some time at least," answers Lillis Fane.

"We can't be! Do you dare to say that you feel as if you and I were nothing to each other, Lil? You cannot have forgotten *yet!*"

"No! I have not forgotten!" says Lil sadly.

"My darling! I believe I have been quite mad since the moment I said good-bye to you that night at Corraghmore!

What I have suffered, God alone knows. And *you* don't look happy, child, either; you must have suffered heavily!"

"Yes," answers the girl simply.

"Aren't you tired *yet*, Lil? Won't you come with me now and let me save you from a marriage which can only make you miserable? Think, darling, how happy we might be together, never to part from each other until our lives' end!"

"It *can't* be, Neal; for pity's sake don't torture me so!"

"Lil, again last night I dreamt that we were out in the Far West together, and that we were sailing in at the Golden Gate, you and I alone, and all the world left far behind; why should it not be so in reality?"

"Because in two months' time I shall be Ernest Craven's wife!"

"You *dare* not marry him!" and Neal Trench's voice is hoarse with passion. "Will you go and stand before God's altar and swear to cleave to *him* only, when you know that you are *mine* and mine alone? Is the wreck of *my* life to be accounted as nothing compared to his? Lil, Lil, I cannot live without you; don't leave me, child!"

"Have mercy, Neal!" and heavy sobs break forth from the brave, tortured little heart.

"My pet, my darling, don't cry so! Well, I will never ask you more! Only if the pain one has to face in this world is compensated for in the next, you ought to

be sure of an eternity of happiness, dear one!"

"And you too!"

"No!—my one hope in life has been in you, darling; I'm too old to change my stake now."

"Neal, promise me you won't live badly? That you'll try to — to — keep straight, you know. For my sake, try!"

"For your sake, my own, I'll try to live my life as if you were by my side. I need say no more. Where shall you be married, Lil?"

"In London, the end of April."

"Shall I see you again?"

"No. What good would it be to either of us if we brought such agony on ourselves once more! Good-bye, Neal; but

only tell me that you forgive me and think I have done right before I go, and then I can bear whatever life brings on me!"

"What have *I* to forgive, dear one? It is for you to forgive me! Will you do so, Lil? And when you are sitting by your fire-side, will you sometimes think of how well I loved you, ay! and *shall* love you, as long as life lasts. Now good-bye, and Heaven guard you, my darling!"

Neal Trench turns "St. Julien" short round and gallops down the ride as if afraid to trust himself one instant longer, whilst his companion almost mechanically restrains "Kittane" from following. The painful ordeal just passed through, coupled with the fatigue of the morning's work, had thoroughly shaken poor Lil, and it is

with intense relief that a few moments after she hears Lord Connistoun say:

"You'd better go home now, for you've done quite enough with one horse, Lil. And you look pretty done up yourself! My first horse will be going home too, so the man will open the gates for you, and everything of that sort."

"Very well, Con. Then I'll start at once, as I see you have changed horses already." And Lil rides slowly through the crowd, on her homeward way.

Once clear of observation the girl's heart breaks down under the strain, and hot, scalding tears rain down the little pale face, though she chokes back the heavy sobs resolutely at thought of their being heard by the servant behind.

Do what she will, one thought alone keeps surging through her brain: "Why cannot that dream of the Far West come true!" and wildly and despairingly ring in her ears the appealing words: "Lil, Lil! don't leave me, child!" One desperate resolution must be taken: this marriage should come off now or never! For one instant a vague thought comes into the girl's mind,—"Should she go to Ernest Craven and tell him that she could not marry him because she loved another man more, and beg him to give her back her plighted word?"—but it does not stay there an instant. For, far above the thought of what deep sorrow such an act would bring to the kind, loving heart of the man who was her betrothed husband, and far above the pain it would bring to

kind-hearted "Con" and his gentle old mother, stands out clear as day before the girl's heart: that for simple honour's sake she dare not break her word! And with a heavy sigh she determines to end all doubts and uncertainties this very day, by settling the time for her marriage even sooner than has been arranged.

Lil's thoughts are interrupted suddenly by "Kittane," who shies at a heap of stones by the roadside, and sidles and tears at her bit to intimate her equine wrath at being restrained to so slow a pace. So her mistress lets her break into a trot, and an hour's steady riding brings them to the lodge-gates of Craven Place. After delivering the mare into Pat Conolly's charge when they arrive in the stable-yard, Lil makes her way into the

house, across the hall, and straight into the library, intent on propounding her new ideas on the subject of her marriage without further delay.

Lord Ernest Craven is sitting in the deep bay window, with his usual company of learned books at his elbow, and puts one finger on the paragraph from which he must turn his eyes perforce away, as he looks up to greet the entrance of his little *fiancée*.

"Well, Lil, you're back earlier than I expected. You haven't lamed your mare I hope, dear?"

"No, thank you, Ernest, 'Kittane' is all right. But we'd a glorious run in the morning—a *real* good gallop—and Con thought I had better go home after

it, as my mare had already done a great deal, you know."

"So much the better for me, for I shall have you all the rest of the afternoon to myself." And yet in spite of this loving sentiment, Ernest Craven gives a wistful glance at his cherished volume of science, as he carefully marks the page and puts the book on one side for further perusal on some future day.

"Let's come and sit by the fire, I'm so cold," says Lil, shuddering at some undefined feeling of having received a chill, but whether of mind or body she scarcely knows.

"You've ridden home too slowly I expect," answers Lord Ernest, poking the fire into a merry blaze as he speaks

and subsiding into his favourite arm-chair before it. "Come and sit on the rug in your usual position," he continues, "and you'll soon be warm again, little one."

Lil seats herself down on the hearth-rug obediently, and then lays her head silently against her future husband's knee, wondering in her heart how in the world she is to break to him the fact of her unmaidenly wish to be married in haste! After considering and composing several set speeches, all of which are speedily condemned to permanent oblivion, she breaks into her subject with a calm frankness which almost astounds herself.

"Ernest, I've been thinking about

our wedding and I want it to be soon; as soon as possible!"

"My dearest Lil! I'm only too thankful! The sooner the better, of course, but how soon *can* we have it?"

"The end of next month, instead of the month after, if you like."

"If I like! why what are you dreaming of, dear?"

"You're *sure* you don't mind marrying me sooner than you thought, Ernest?" asks Lil gravely.

"I'm *very* sure I don't, you quaint little girl!" answers her future husband, who is even roused out of his abnormal state of dreamy absent-mindedness, at the prospect of the completion of his happiness being so near.

"Very well, then, you must let me go back to Ireland at the end of this week and get my things ready, and then we can be married in a month's time from this, Ernest, if you like."

"What day, dear? Say some date that I may believe you really mean it."

"Indeed I mean it, Ernest. Very well, I will say the twentieth of next month; will that do?"

"Perfectly. I'm not likely to find fault with it. And now tell me, where would you like to go for your honeymoon, little woman?"

"Oh! I don't care a bit, I'll leave all that to you. You know so much more about travelling than I do," says Lil, — and the unconcerned tone and calm carelessness of the girl's manner,

unconsciously tell a tale sad and apparent enough to any one less unworldly than the dreamy student and his unsophisticated child-bride!

Heartily is the new arrangement approved of by old Lady Connistoun and her eldest son, who are only too anxious to call Lil "daughter" and "sister" as speedily as possible. And she is allowed to hurry back to Ireland undeterred, that she may forthwith prepare that extraordinary quantity of habiliments and garments of every description which appear to be part of the matrimonial service in the minds of all serious and well-brought-up young women; and also, to listen obediently to the words of wisdom which fall from her father's lawyer concerning those pro-

saic but necessary articles—"settlements," which as it happened were in this case a simple matter enough; as, owing to her father's state of intellect, the will he had made years before in his daughter's favour had come into force now (under certain restrictions), and Lillis Fane was virtually mistress of the River House and all other property belonging to him.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Time turns the old days to derision,
Our loves into corpses or wives;
And marriage, and death, and division,
Make barren our lives."

DOLORES.

CHAPTER VIII.

DIVIDED.

THE twentieth of March broke sadly and gloomily upon the world of the great metropolis—its foggy, raw atmosphere most unpleasantly mixed with a sort of driving sleet of rain and snow combined. It taxed even the patience of a London crowd to wait long outside a church-door on a morning such as this; but still a few women and one or two street boys waited on patiently outside the door of St. G—'s in the hope that their patience might in

time be duly rewarded by that exhilarating sight to the lower orders—a smart wedding.

The red cloth laid down on the church steps promised well. So did the appearance of those who occupied the large string of carriages which now began to arrive. For the friends and relatives of the house of Craven had assembled in full force to do honour to the marriage of the second son of that house, in default of seeing any chance of assisting at a like ceremony where his elder brother was concerned. To many it seemed strange, and to the softer-hearted beings amongst them almost sad, that whereas the bridegroom could number friends and relations without end there present, the little childish bride had no one soul of her own kith

and kin by her, nor any single friend to wish her even "God speed!"

The front pews facing the chancel, and the chancel itself, are all filled with the wedding-guests, and in the body of the church are scattered many casual lookers-on, such as no wedding in a town ever was without. High up in one of the pews of the gallery overhead, and almost concealed by a huge stone pillar reaching from the floor to the vaulted roof of the church, stands a man whose restless, anxious watch on all things taking place before his eyes, seems to speak of some far deeper interest than mere idle curiosity having brought him there. It is Neal Trench, who had been in Italy when he first heard that Lord Ernest Craven's marriage would take place

earlier than expected, and who has travelled day and night to be here in time now!

Sad and worn enough looks the handsome dark face, but there is a look of stern resolution on it such as declares that the spirit within may have been sadly bent but cannot be broken! Haggard and worn and ill as he looks, there is something almost grand in Neal Trench's face as he steels himself resolutely to look on at the wrecking of all his hopes of happiness on earth, and the loss of the one only love his wild reckless nature has ever bowed before.

Can it be true, he thinks half shudderingly to himself, that he is standing there to see "the child" married, this dark March morning? That it is his own little

darling, whose face he sees in dreams each night and which haunts him during every hour of the day, whom he will presently see standing before the altar in her white bridal dress, to take the solemn vows that will bind her to another man as long as they both shall live! Incessant travelling and want of rest have told on even Neal Trench's iron frame, and he feels a sort of stunned bewilderment over all things in his mind, which he cannot shake off.

Hark! the great organ begins to play the Wedding March, and there is a rustling and a hum of expectancy all over the church, as every eye turns towards the door awaiting the appearance of the bride. Neal's heart gives a wild throb as he recognizes Lord Connistoun advancing slowly up the middle aisle,—and leaning

on his arm a little golden-haired vision all in white.

A sudden flash of memory brings before Neal's mind his own words, spoken to Lillis Fane the night of the ball at Corraghmore, when the thought had struck him of how lovely she would be dressed as a bride, and when he had told her she "looked perfect in all white." "Ay! perfect enough!" he thinks sadly, as his eyes follow her whilst she advances to the altar and takes her stand before it, —and "all white" in very truth! White is the beautiful bridal dress and veil, and like flakes of snow are the flowers artistically scattered over it,—but whiter than all is the face of the bride!

And yet she neither weeps nor trembles, as is the way of ordinary brides on

their wedding morn; happy maidens who are leaving their sunny childhood's home behind them for ever, and yet whose tears have a certain joy almost as much as sorrow in them, for they are content so to do.

Lillis Fane stands before the altar erect and calm, with her little head thrown proudly and defiantly back as if daring herself to show any sign of weakness; but her mouth has a stern set look, which harmonizes badly with the extreme youth of her face, and her great grey eyes have a sad and almost *farouche* expression in them, such as one sees in those of some hunted animal at bay.

The service begins; and whereas the bridegroom looks nervous enough, and fidgets the wedding-ring about in his fin-

gers to an extent which makes its dropping bodily on to the floor only a question of time, the bride listens unmovedly and scarcely stirs. Once she glances at Lord Connistoun's face as he stands beside her, and almost smiles at the alarming solemnity of his usually cheery face, which at this moment wears an expression more befitting a funeral than a marriage feast. And, in sooth, good reason has "Con" to look far from jovial at this moment, for it has just come home to him that at this very hour of 11.30, the Grasshire hounds are just about settling down to their first fox, from the small but famous covert of Deepthorns, near which they are advertised to meet this day; and ruefully does "Con" speculate on the fact that they are quite sure to run over the cream of their country,

and have *the* gallop of the season, just because he is not there!

Clear and unfaltering ring out the words of the bride, as she swears to cleave only to him who stands beside her until the vow shall be cancelled by death alone; and the first ray of sunshine that has been seen on her face for many a day breaks forth at the cheery congratulation of her brother-in-law when he wishes her joy at the conclusion of the service, and adds in a low voice:

"Ernest looks more like other men in this work-a-day world already, Lil, just from sheer happiness!"

But as she turns to leave the altar, some unknown power impels her to lift her eyes to the gallery over-head, and pale as she looked before she turns paler yet as

she recognizes the dark haggard face that is looking down on her, and meets the hopeless, despairing look in the deep grey eyes she knows so well! With a desperate effort the girl tries to control the deadly faintness that is creeping over her mind and body, and though, when told to sign "Lillis Fane" in the matrimonial register, she stares vacantly as if she had never heard that name before, still her singular self-command and indomitable pride enable her to smile and talk, and to accept the congratulations which pour in from every side, with all apparent gaiety and happiness of heart. Only once again does she involuntarily glance up at the gallery over-head, and gives a sigh of relief at seeing that it is empty and untenanted by any living soul.

All through the trying ordeal of that unwholesomest and most wearisome meal—a wedding-breakfast,—and all through the preparations for her subsequent departure, the bride's spirits never flag; and brightly and gaily she bows to all the numerous well-wishers who stand up glass in hand to pledge "the bride and bridegroom," with three hearty cheers.

The best of impressions does the "little wild Irish girl" leave behind her on all the new circle of friends and relations, whose faces all look so unknown and strange to her; and when she comes down afterwards in her pretty travelling-dress of darkest brown velvet, and shakes hands with all the servants standing in a row ready to wish her joy, and thanks them for their kind wishes, no bride's face

ever looked brighter and happier than does that of Ernest Craven's young wife.

And if she has no relatives of her own to bewail themselves over her loss, that fact is amply compensated for by the unceasing flow of tears which good old Lady Connistoun has shed the whole livelong morning from sheer joy. Copiously did she weep down the front of her pew during the service in church, and hysterically has she sobbed all through the most would-be mirthful speeches at the wedding-breakfast, and now she has subsided on to a quiet sofa in the inner drawing-room of Lord Connistoun's small but comfortable town house (where the last scene of the marriage festivity has taken place), and is perfectly deluged in

floods of tears, which burst out anew at every fresh word spoken in praise of her beloved, newly-gained daughter.

At last all partings are over, all good-byes are said, and the carriage doors are peremptorily shut by Lord Connistoun, with the reminder that they've only just time enough to catch the Continental train at Victoria Station, (an admonition which causes the bride's head to remain anxiously stuck out of window most of the way, in order to judge of their rate of progression,) and Lord and Lady Ernest Craven are fairly started upon their wedding-tour.



CHAPTER IX.

"I shall never be friends again with roses;
I shall loathe sweet tunes, where a note grown strong
Relents and recoils, and climbs and closes,
As a wave of the sea turned back by song.
There are sounds where the soul's delight takes fire,
Face to face with its own desire;
A delight that rebels, a desire that reposes,—
I shall hate sweet music my whole life long."

THE TRIUMPH OF TIME.

CHAPTER IX.

THE "BLUE DANUBE."

THOUGH the hour was four o'clock in the afternoon of a July day, the sun was shining still hotly down on the large gardens adjoining that most comfortable of hotels —the "Englischer Hof" at Naseweis-am-Rhein. In spite of the heat, however, the walks and alleys of the said gardens were crowded with that heterogeneous mass of humanity which can only be seen to perfection congregated together at a fashionable watering-place on the Conti-

nent. Representatives of every country and every trade were assembled there, and the confusion of tongues brought to mind that tower of old, at the building of which were confounded all the languages on earth.

There were some few confounded on this hot afternoon in the gardens of the "Englischer Hof" also; and on the stone terrace, outside the large *salle-à-manger* of the hotel, were scattered groups sitting at each little round table, and talking, arguing, and vociferating in all the languages of Europe, with a strong flavour of the American accent audible over everything else.

Out of the open window of a large airy sitting-room on the second floor, and looking into the gardens, leant a young

girl with arms crossed on the window-sill, listlessly watching the ever-changing forms, faces, and scenes, which pass before her in the crowd below. Lady Ernest Craven is somewhat puzzled how to dispose of the next hour, till it shall be cool enough to go for the usual drive to some ruin of convent or castle, such as it is *de rigueur* for all well-brought-up young couples to do when enjoying their wedding tour. Not even the strains of the "Tausend und Eine Nacht," which the band in the gardens is at this moment playing as only a German band *in* Germany can play, have power to remove the disconsolate expression from her face; and the Lady Ernest, after yawning sufficiently to dislocate her jaws, finally rouses herself to turn round and address a

remark to the only other occupant of the before-mentioned sitting-room.

"Ernest! do leave that horrid book and come and look at the people. It's so dull doing it by oneself!"

"In one minute, Lil," answers her husband, devouring the last few lines of a treatise on the comparative power of the four elements, which he has been fortunate enough to pick up during one of his morning walks abroad.

"What is there to look at?" he continues, pulling his chair close up to the window and lighting a cigar, with a view to consoling his spirit for its untimely separation from its beloved books.

"Oh! there's lots to see, Ernest, if you only keep your eyes open. Why there's more to study in that group of

faces on those chairs nearest to us than in a hundred books!" says Lil, nodding her head as she speaks towards several people of a better type of visitor than were most of those by whom they were surrounded. And yet the men were there chiefly to avoid notoriety, the women to gain it.

"Look at that fat, respectable-looking British paterfamilias, Ernest, sitting on the third chair from the end. I've been watching him—the old sinner—and you should see the way he has been making up to that golden-haired female in pink sitting next to him! He's just bought such a lovely bouquet from that little girl with the flower-basket, and has given it to her. I do hope that the materfamilias is looking at him from some top window, for

I dare say she only let him go out to buy a newspaper!"

"Let's give him the benefit of the doubt, Lil, and vote him a bachelor."

"No! I'm sure he isn't; quite sure! He's got such a look of being in the enjoyment of stolen sweets on his fat old face! People generally look bored over any pleasures that are quite legitimate, Ernest. Look at the difference between the expression on that good little boy's face on the left, listening to the music, sitting by his mamma's side and dressed in his best clothes, to that on the face of the ragged little gamin sitting on the grass behind him, who has already had two free fights with the liveried authorities of the garden in asserting his right

to listen to a band which is only intended for the amusement of his betters. That good little boy who has a right to be there doesn't enjoy it half as much as does the wicked little boy, who hasn't!"

"Do you apply that view to every pleasure in life, Lil?" answers Ernest Craven, laughing.

"No, not altogether, my dear boy. But I'm trying to learn the world, you see. *You* learn it from books, but I want to learn it by observing the ways of my fellow-creatures. Don't sit there dreaming, Ernest, for I want you to tell me what our plans are after we return to our native shores next week?"

"Well, it's no use staying in London,

Lil, for it'll be August by then, and there won't be a soul in it you know."

"But couldn't we stay there even a week, Ernest? Just to do St. Paul's, and the Monument, and the Tower?"

"My dear Lil!" exclaims her husband in a tone of mild expostulation.

"Well, but I've never seen them, and I ought to; oughtn't I?"

"There's no necessity for it that I'm aware of. Many people who always live in London even have never seen them, so I think you can afford to wait till next spring without compromising your taste for sights, little girl!"

"Very well, Ernest. Then we shall go straight to Ireland I suppose?"

"Yes, I think so; don't you? And as the Corraghmores have asked us for the

12th, it seems to me we had better accept that invitation from the O'Connors which I received yesterday, asking us to go to them on the 8th. They're only about thirty miles from Corraghmore, so it would be no trouble, would it?"

"Not a bit; and they've been so kind too in begging me to have 'Kittane' sent over for myself to ride on the long expeditions which they talk of. I wonder if she will be half as pleased to see me again as I shall be to see her!"

"It was certainly very kind of young O'Connor to tell you to bring her. By the way, isn't he to come of age that week too?"

"So he said in his letter. That'll be rather fun, Ernest, won't it! For they're sure to have big dinners, and perhaps even a ball!"

And Lady Ernest's eyes begin to dance at the prospect which still possesses all the charm of unsatiety to her heart.

"Ernest," she inquires in an awe-struck tone, "do you think I had better wear those diamonds which you and Con gave me, if there *is* a ball?"

"Of course you must. It'll be your first appearance in your own part of the world as a bride, and you ought to do honour to the occasion."

His wife's thoughts have left the diamonds, and are busy with the past. They have flown back to the ball at Corraghmore, nearly a year ago now; and she almost starts when, by some strange coincidence, the band in the garden suddenly begins to play a valse, and the beautiful notes of the "Blue Danube" come pealing

in at the open window. The brightness dies out of her face, a dreamy look comes into her eyes, and the present, with all belonging to it, is fading out of her sight. The garden before her and its crowd of faces passes dimly away into the far distance, and even the old paterfamilias, whose little peccadilloes have been the source of so much amusement and speculation to her for the last hour, gets up from his chair and walks away with the lady in pink on his arm, without attracting so much as one look from the sad wistful grey eyes.

But Lil Craven has not determined to let the past be past for nothing; and her strong, free, resolute nature enables her always to conquer those "dark hours" by which every soul on earth is assailed at

times, and which can so often bow down the weak even to the ground.

"Look, Ernest!" she exclaims, with her own gay, ringing laugh,—"do look at the 'shandrydan' they are bringing round to the side door of the hotel, and which we are to 'take the air' in! It's got a green body and red wheels, and there's a cream-coloured beast on the off side and a skewbald on the other! Well, if that quiet turn-out isn't enough to sink 'les Anglais' in any decent person's estimation I should like to know what is! and yet I'm sure we're guiltless of having selected it! It's too bad to give us a thing like a circus-carriage to drive out in, Ernest!"

"My dear Lil, we can't help taking what they like to give us in the way of carriages and horses at an hotel!"

"Yes, but we can tell them we don't like it! Oh dear! I wish I knew anything of French or German! Here, waiter!" she calls, seeing one of the black-clothed officials of the hotel passing by the half-open door of their sitting-room, who obeys her summons more from instinct than comprehension, and stands to attention, twisting his napkin into tortuous shapes.

"Waiter, pourquoi nous avons un carriage,—I mean carrosse,—avec des circus chevaux?"

"Comment, Madame?"

"Voilà ces chevaux!" resumes the Lady Ernest indignantly, pointing out of window, her French by no means keeping pace with her just wrath. "Il y a un qui a le nez *pink*,—et l'autre, au near side, est

tout rouge et blanc comme un—un petit cochon, no!—Ernest, what's French for a guinea-pig?"

"I don't know," answers her husband laughing, whilst the polite waiter, in the belief that it is nervousness which is prompting "Milady" to this vehement expostulation at sight of the horses prepared for her, keeps assuring her "qu'ils sont très forts, très doux," thereby driving her to the verge of utter exasperation. But as there appears to be no remedy to the fact that either behind those parti-coloured horses, and in that green carriage with red wheels, Lady Ernest must take her drive or else stay at home, she bows to the necessity graciously, and sitting beside her husband in solemn pomp, is driven off

triumphantly with as many "hoop-la's" and cracks of the whip as are assuredly quite sufficient to justify her statement that it was a machine attached to a circus which had been selected for them.

A week later Lord Ernest and his wife returned to England, and after a day's rest in London, proceeded straight to the north of Ireland, with the intention of paying their previously-arranged visit to Drummore, the grand old home of the O'Connors; and where, a few days later on, the last representative of that time-honoured name was to hold high revelry by night and day, in honour of having attained his majority and arrived at years of discretion.



CHAPTER X.

"Non, ma jeunesse n'est pas morte,
Il n'est pas mort ton souvenir."

SCÈNES DE LA VIE DE BOHÈME.

CHAPTER X.

DRUMMORE.

AGAIN it is August in the north of Ireland. The heathery mountains shine all purple and gold in the rays of the setting sun, and the old castle of Kilcorran seems lit up as if by fire where the red glow of sunset is streaming upon it. It lights up also the little white River House down in the valley below, and shines brightly into the dazzled eyes of the poor old imbecile there, as he sits on the lawn in front of it, and holds out his hands towards the

brightness as if he would grasp its rays, laughing gleefully the while like a little child.

The click of the gate as it opens and closes again makes him look round, and a shrinking look of terror and dislike comes over his face, which the presence of a stranger invariably brings there.

"I'm Neal Trench, Mr. Fane," says the new-comer in a kind, cheery tone, holding out his hand to the old man,—"your neighbour at Kilcorran, do you remember? I'm only here for a day or two on my way out to America again, and came just to see how you were."

The poor old man peered up into Neal's face as he surrendered, more than gave, his hand to him, and whispered:

"You've not come to take me away, have you? They took Jack first, and then my girl, and it'll be my turn next!"

"No, no, I'm only come to ask how you are getting on alone. You must miss your daughter, I think."

"Ay, my girl, my girl! She went away like Jack; she went to find poor Jack, I think. But they have never come back, either of them. You haven't seen them anywhere, have you?"

"No, I haven't," answers Neal soothingly. "But your daughter will soon come back again I feel sure."

"Ay, will she? That's what I hear them say at night. If I could only get out then I know I could find her. They come whispering to me in the dark, and sometimes I hear her singing when the

Rhua is rushing along after a storm, and she calls me so loud sometimes; but Robarts tells me to go to sleep again, and won't let me out!"

"Oh! no, you couldn't go out in the night, of course. Robarts is quite right."

"Is he? But I want my girl,—oh! I do so want my girl!" and the old man sobs childishly, as he rocks himself backwards and forwards in his chair,—whilst Mr. Trench stands looking at him sadly, feeling that in his own heart also is even a greater void than in that of the desolate old man's; and he turns slowly away to continue his walk homewards.

On the table in the big oak hall of Kilcorran lays a note for the master of the house, who takes it up carelessly and

wanders out on to the terrace, where he opens and reads it:

"*Drummore,*
"*August 7th.*

"DEAR TRENCH,

"I HEAR from a friend of mine that you came over in the same boat as himself, two days ago. We're in the middle of a most festive week here in honour of my having arrived at years of discretion; and though it's almost too late to ask you, I want you to come over to-morrow and stay here, as our winding-up dance is to-morrow night.

"We've the Corraghmores and all your old friends in the house, and the Ernest Cravens. The bride is charming. One of Corraghmore's servants will leave this

note at Kilcorran, but don't trouble to answer it, as there's a spare room ready for you. Only mind come.

"Yours ever,

"T. O'Connor."

Long did Neal Trench sit on the wall of the old terrace staring dreamily at the hills far away, now darkening rapidly as the neutral tints and shadows of evening took the place of the golden glory of sunset.

To see her once more, to hear her voice and to touch her hand, ay! the temptation was too great to be resisted. Go to Drummore he must!

The next day, just as he was starting on his long thirty miles' drive, Mr. Trench was detained by his agent,

Malone, who came to give him warning that the river, being at high flood owing to late rains, was threatening a certain cabin, which with its adjacent cowshed had been built too near its edge.

"An it's jist dhrowned the crathurs will be intoirely, Sorr, if the Rhua rises one foot more."

"Is there such a big flood then?" asked Neal in surprise.

"The biggest we've had for years, Sorr, an 'deed we don't know what to make of it. If it's jist from ordinary causes, it'll go down agin and sorra a bit of harrm it'll do at all at all. But if the Rhua rises as it's done before in back years, the Lord have marcy on our souls and bodies!"

"But those were extraordinary floods,

and quite unaccountable, from what I can make out," answered Neal. "There can hardly be any chance of those occurring now, I should think. Any way, Malone, make those Gormans leave their cabin for a day or two, and they can send their cattle up here if they like, tell them."

"I will, yer honner. I'll go at once. It's a saft day ye've got for yer journey, I'm afeared, Sorr," added Misther Malone, as a violent gust of wind came moaning up the valley, and the black clouds gathering on all sides seemed to give warning of deluges to come.

"It's a very soft day indeed!" thought Mr. Trench to himself, as in less than five minutes the rain began to pour down like a water-spout, and he turned up the collar of his great coat and made all necessary

preparations to ward off the elements as best he could. In crossing the bridge over the river he glanced down at the flood on each side of him. The Rhua well deserved its cognomen that day, for its turbulent, muddy waters were dyed of a deep red colour, and it seemed muttering angrily to itself as it swept and rolled along.

But a turn of the road hid it from view, and Neal had soon after quite enough to do to make head against the violence of the storm which came driving down the valley.

It was a weary, long thirty miles to Drummore, the wind and rain beating against them all the way; and Mr. Trench arrived at length at his destination, only to find that dinner was already half over, it having been put at an earlier hour in

consequence of the dining-room being required later on as a ball-room. However, a careful toilette, and an excellent though hurried dinner in his host's smoking-room, had restored him speedily to happiness and comfort of body, but it was with some trepidation of mind that he followed the latter individual into the large drawing-room, where all the guests staying in the house were assembled to wait for those who were coming later to the dance.

A glance round the room told him instantly that the one face he sought was not present then; and it was with a great sense of momentary relief that he exchanged greetings with Lady Corraghmore and the many old friends whom he encountered on every side.

Some one suggested beguiling the time which they might have to wait with a song; and with one accord came a general inquiry: "Where's Lady Ernest? won't she sing us something?" followed by the exclamation: "Oh! here she is! Do come and sing that song of yours "In the Gloaming;" will you, Lady Ernest?"

Neal turns his head and sees Lillis Craven advancing down the room, in a white dress trimmed with deep violet velvet, (she had carried out her resolution never to wear "all white" again,)—with diamond stars on neck and breast and in her hair,—and in her eyes the same odd, scared, "hunted" look he had seen in them on her wedding-day, and which tell him plainer than words can tell that she knows of his presence there to-night.

But not a trace of nervousness is in her manner as she calmly shakes hands with him; and then, turning and walking straight to the piano, begins without further delay to sing the song asked for.

She gets through the first verse admirably, her glorious voice sounding clearer and sweeter than ever, but when she begins the last one it falters audibly. By a strong effort she succeeds in regaining her composure to all outward eyes, but the deep thrilling tone of intense pain which is plainly to be discerned in her voice makes her listeners almost shiver as they listen to the words:

"In the gloaming, oh! my darling, when the lights
are dim and low,
And the quiet shadows falling softly come and softly
go,

When the winds are sobbing faintly with a gentle unknown woe,—
Will you think of me and love me, as you did once long ago?

* * * * *

"In the gloaming, oh! my darling, think not bitterly of me!
Though I passed away in silence, left you lonely, set you free;
For my heart was crushed with longing, what had been could never be:
It was best to leave you thus, dear—best for you, and best for me." *

Neal feels his heart almost breaking at sound of the pain in the sweet, childish voice; but he has come to help and not to hinder her in life's rough way, and he forces himself to talk to her gaily and naturally whilst she stands by the piano putting on her gloves, after the song is over, until the scared, nervous look leaves

* Arranged by A. Fortescue Harrison. Published by Hutchings and Romer, 9, Conduit Street.

her eyes, and once more the bright merry smile of past days lights up her face.

They only dance once together in the course of the evening, for the thrill that shakes Neal's very frame, as he takes the bride's hand in the quadrille with which the ball opens, teaches him not to try his strength harder than he can bear. By chance, the valse for which he comes to claim Lil as partner is once again the the old "Blue Danube"; and though each heart beats wildly, and to both its beautiful wailing notes bring back the unforgotten past, still they talk quietly and calmly, and neither of them shows by word or sign that they "remember."

"Where is your husband, Lil? I had hoped to make his acquaintance to-night?" asks Neal Trench, who, it must

be confessed, has in reality been cursing that absent young man vigorously and heartily the entire evening.

"He had to go back to England unexpectedly yesterday. There was some business his brother wanted him particularly for, and he doesn't like festivities much, so wasn't sorry to get away for a day or two."

"I am sorry, for I shan't see him at all, I fear. I'm off again to the west of America next Saturday."

"Are you? how I envy you!" says Lil earnestly, as the thought strikes her of how much easier it would be to face any distance or danger sooner than to sit quietly at home and *think!*

"How is 'Kittane'?" inquires Mr. Trench.

"Very well indeed. She is here at Drummore, too, and I've had two or three rides on her already this week." And for the first time that night Lady Ernest's bright face looks its old natural self once more.

"How you do worship that little mare, Lil!" and a half-jealous pang, of even an animal if loved by Lillis Craven, shoots through Neal Trench's saddened heart, and a wild desire rushes into it to carry her off then and there, far away with him alone, to keep her and to hold her in defiance of all the world.

But people's thoughts and wishes don't display themselves openly in good society, so he only suggests "one turn more," after which they go to the tea-room, an apartment situated at some little distance

from the room where the dancing is going on.

On their way down the passage which leads to it, one of the servants of the house comes forward to meet Mr. Trench, with the words:

"There is a man anxious to speak to you, Sir, as soon as possible. It's some one from your own place, I think, Sir."

"What the devil can be the matter?" mutters Neal, but catches sight of a weird, wet figure hiding behind the servant who had just spoken, and exclaims:

"Is that you, Dennis M'Carthy? What's the matter?"

"Deed it's jist meself, yer honner; least ways it's me soul, but me body's nigh perished wid the could an' the wather! The Rhua's risen, yer honner,

and Misther Malone sent me aff at oncest to tell ye that the whole town is nigh under wather, an' the sheep an' the cattle is drownin' under their very eyes, an' Gorman's house has been swept away with three of the childher sleepin' in it!"

"Good God! why I told Malone to make them leave it this very afternoon!"

"Deed an' I heard him say those very words, yer honour. 'But I'll wait till evenin', Misther Malone,' says Gorman, 'till we see if maybe the river goes down, says he. An' sorra a bit it went down,' but jist up an' up; an' at last they had to run for it, yer honner, carryin' three of the childher in their arms, an' before they could get back to fetch the other three the house itself was just swept away intoirely."

"How dreadful!" bursts out Lil Craven. "Oh! Neal, do start at once and go there; you're sure to be able to help the poor people."

"Of course I shall. Order my dog-cart round in ten minutes," he adds to the astonished servant waiting in the background. "Have you come all the way on foot, Dennis?"

"Deed no, yer honner. I got a lift in the post-cart for the first twelve miles or so, but it's bad travellin' to-night for man an' baste!"

"Well, I'll ask for something for you to eat, and then you can drive back with me. Only make haste about it, mind."

"Troth I will, yer honner." And Dennis shuffles off, the water dripping from his clothes as he walks in the wake

of the magnificent menial who convoys him to the back regions.

"Neal, isn't it dreadful about those poor children!" says Lil tearfully.

"Yes, terrible!—I only hope there will be no further loss of life, that's all;" and he thinks anxiously of Lil's own father, whose house is so near the treacherous Rhua too! Strange to say this fear has not yet entered the girl's mind, for, partly because of the distance of ground between the River House and the river itself, and partly because of the several careful watchers that guard the poor old man who lives within its walls, no thought of danger to its inmates crosses her mind for a moment. But still it is with a heavy heart, after saying good-night to Neal and returning to the ball-

room where the dancing is continuing fast and furious, (for it is scarcely midnight yet,) that she tries to resume the gaiety of before; and do what she will, Lil Craven cannot shut out from her thoughts the memory of the tragedy wrought by the Rhua that day, and an intense longing to be amongst her people in their hour of trouble and danger takes possession of her heart. Still she forces herself mechanically to dance and talk as the night wears slowly on, until a sudden fear makes her very heart stand still, as all in one moment the thought comes home to her that perhaps the River House itself is in danger! With an effort she commands herself sufficiently to walk quietly to the door, and once out in the cool passage outside she tries to think.

"Me Lady," says a voice close to her, "I've been waitin' an' waitin' these two hours an' more to see ye! Did ye know that the Rhua has risen? And Dennis McCarthy, who brought word of it to Misther Trench, says that the wather was already close up to the River House, when he looked back from the top of the hill at it!" and Pat Conolly's face is blanched with fear, as he pours forth his evil tidings with that zeal which the lower orders always display when they are the bearers of bad news.

Pale as death is Lil Craven's face as she turns to him, and says:

"Go to the stables at once. They're all up to-night so you can get into the harness-room easily enough. Get my saddle out of it and put it on 'Kittane,'

and bring her round to the little gate on the right-hand side of the stable-yard as quick as you can."

"But, me Lady, arrah! sure ye're not thinkin' of ridin' all that way at noight alone? It's thirty English miles, me Lady, and a wild bad noight!"

"Do as I tell you, Pat," says Lady Ernest peremptorily. "And mind you say no word to any one, but just wait at the little gate with the mare until I come."

"I will, an' ye tell me to, me Lady!" answers Pat Conolly ruefully, and returns upon his steps to obey his mistress's orders.

Meanwhile Lil Craven flies up-stairs, pulls off her dress and tears the diamonds out of her hair like one demented; and in

"Perhaps. He's a confounded snob."

"Well, you can't say much against Captain Sabreur any way, Neal? For he's certainly good-looking enough and a thorough gentleman."

"Oh! Sabreur's a very good fellow. But he's a conceited ass!"

Does the woman live who likes hearing any man abused whom she knows to care even the least little bit for herself? Let his short-comings be what they may, it is enough, if he like *her*, for that fact to cover a multitude of sins. Consequently, Lady Ernest Craven turns round decisively on her companion and says honestly:

"I like Captain Sabreur, Neal, and won't hear him abused, please. He has always been kind and nice to me, and one

ought to speak of people as one finds them, oughtn't one? But I'll let you abuse Mr. Vavasour as much as you like, because I don't know him, and if he isn't a gentleman I'm sure I shan't like him!"

"Very well, little one! I'm afraid I *am* in a beastly bad temper to-night for some unknown reason, but we'll leave the merits and demerits of the impending visitors alone, and I'll tell you a story on the subject of 'le bon sang ne peut mentir,' which tickled my fancy extremely at the time. The last winter that I was down here hunting, there was a day that one of our best jockeys was out too, a man who is as well known for his brilliant riding to hounds as he is for winning the great 'double event' when he steered the Lord of Lyonesse to

victory, or for the glorious but fatal struggle which sealed the fate of brave Dundee. On the occasion I speak of, C— was riding a little narrow thoroughbred beast that looked too light almost even to carry *him*, and some of the fortunate possessors of big weight-carrying hunters were commenting freely on the uselessness of regarding the former class of animal in the light of a horse fit for the shires. 'There's one thing in thoroughbred ones,' said C— quietly, 'that they'll *go on* under difficulties when your half-bred ones *won't;* and if ever you find yourself near the end of a run lying in a ditch with your horse on the top of you, too blown to get up, you may be pretty sure that his grandam's name was 'Smiler'!'"

"Yes, that's a first-rate idea," laughs Lil, "and might be applicable to more things than horses. Have you got 'St. Julien' still, by the by?"

"Oh yes. He's not as young as he was, I'm sorry to say, but is as sound as ever. So he ought to be, considering I've only hunted one season out of the last three. I sold all my horses except him when I went abroad the last time. Have you found anything to replace poor 'Kittane'?"

"I've had two or three horses that carried me well enough in their way, but nothing can ever replace 'Kittane' to me!" and tears fill the bright grey eyes at the very mention of her dead favourite's name.

"Do you see that old Pole Star over your head, Lil!" asks Mr. Trench, to turn the conversation. "When I was out in the Far West I used to get up quite a deep sentiment for that star. Many a time, lying at a camp-fire with my head on a saddle, have I stared up at it and wondered what scenes it was looking down on here in old England."

"Did you?" says Lil, dreamily. "Neal, I can't help thinking of two paragraphs which I saw in the 'Times' to-day. They seemed to have no connection with each other, and yet, knowing something of the story of both the man and the woman, it seems to me so awfully sad!"

"What were the paragraphs?"

"In the obituary column is stated the

fact of her death, late on a certain day; and in the little Court Circular is mentioned the name of the man as being 'in waiting' on her Majesty that very night! Can any torture be greater than what that man must have endured during all the weary hours of the long evening, when he knew that each moment of it was bringing death nearer and nearer to the one soul on earth he cared for?"

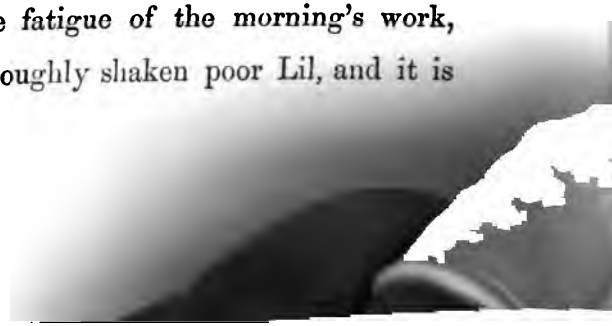
"Yes, it was sad enough! Poor beggar, I pity him most heartily!" and Neal shudders as he pictures what it would have been to himself to have stood in that man's place, and know that the love of his life lay dying!

"Lil, for Heaven's sake don't think of such dismal subjects, child! It's enough

only tell me that you forgive me and think I have done right before I go, and then I can bear whatever life brings on me!"

"What have *I* to forgive, dear one? It is for you to forgive me! Will you do so, Lil? And when you are sitting by your fire-side, will you sometimes think of how well I loved you, ay! and *shall* love you, as long as life lasts. Now good-bye, and Heaven guard you, my darling!"

Neal Trench turns "St. Julien" short round and gallops down the ride as if afraid to trust himself one instant longer, whilst his companion almost mechanically restrains "Kittane" from following. The painful ordeal just passed through, coupled with the fatigue of the morning's work, had thoroughly shaken poor Lil, and it is



with intense relief that a few moments after she hears Lord Connistoun say:

"You'd better go home now, for you've done quite enough with one horse, Lil. And you look pretty done up yourself! My first horse will be going home too, so the man will open the gates for you, and everything of that sort."

"Very well, Con. Then I'll start at once, as I see you have changed horses already." And Lil rides slowly through the crowd, on her homeward way.

Once clear of observation the girl's heart breaks down under the strain, and hot, scalding tears rain down the little pale face, though she chokes back the heavy sobs resolutely at thought of their being heard by the servant behind.

Do what she will, one thought alone keeps surging through her brain: "Why cannot that dream of the Far West come true!" and wildly and despairingly ring in her ears the appealing words: "Lil, Lil! don't leave me, child!" One desperate resolution must be taken: this marriage should come off now or never! For one instant a vague thought comes into the girl's mind,—"Should she go to Ernest Craven and tell him that she could not marry him because she loved another man more, and beg him to give her back her plighted word?"—but it does not stay there an instant. For, far above the thought of what deep sorrow such an act would bring to the kind, loving heart of the man who was her betrothed husband, and far above the pain it would bring to

kind-hearted "Con" and his gentle old mother, stands out clear as day before the girl's heart: that for simple honour's sake she dare not break her word! And with a heavy sigh she determines to end all doubts and uncertainties this very day, by settling the time for her marriage even sooner than has been arranged.

Lil's thoughts are interrupted suddenly by "Kittane," who shies at a heap of stones by the roadside, and sidles and tears at her bit to intimate her equine wrath at being restrained to so slow a pace. So her mistress lets her break into a trot, and an hour's steady riding brings them to the lodge-gates of Craven Place. After delivering the mare into Pat Conolly's charge when they arrive in the stable-yard, Lil makes her way into the

house, across the hall, and straight into the library, intent on propounding her new ideas on the subject of her marriage without further delay.

Lord Ernest Craven is sitting in the deep bay window, with his usual company of learned books at his elbow, and puts one finger on the paragraph from which he must turn his eyes perforce away, as he looks up to greet the entrance of his little *fiancée.*

"Well, Lil, you're back earlier than I expected. You haven't lamed your mare I hope, dear?"

"No, thank you, Ernest, 'Kittane' is all right. But we'd a glorious run in the morning—a *real* good gallop—and Con thought I had better go home after

it, as my mare had already done a great deal, you know."

"So much the better for me, for I shall have you all the rest of the afternoon to myself." And yet in spite of this loving sentiment, Ernest Craven gives a wistful glance at his cherished volume of science, as he carefully marks the page and puts the book on one side for further perusal on some future day.

"Let's come and sit by the fire, I'm so cold," says Lil, shuddering at some undefined feeling of having received a chill, but whether of mind or body she scarcely knows.

"You've ridden home too slowly I expect," answers Lord Ernest, poking the fire into a merry blaze as he speaks

and subsiding into his favourite arm-chair before it. "Come and sit on the rug in your usual position," he continues, "and you'll soon be warm again, little one."

Lil seats herself down on the hearth-rug obediently, and then lays her head silently against her future husband's knee, wondering in her heart how in the world she is to break to him the fact of her unmaidenly wish to be married in haste! After considering and composing several set speeches, all of which are speedily condemned to permanent oblivion, she breaks into her subject with a calm frankness which almost astounds herself.

"Ernest, I've been thinking about

our wedding and I want it to be soon; as soon as possible!"

"My dearest Lil! I'm only too thankful! The sooner the better, of course, but how soon *can* we have it?"

"The end of next month, instead of the month after, if you like."

"If I like! why what are you dreaming of, dear?"

"You're *sure* you don't mind marrying me sooner than you thought, Ernest?" asks Lil gravely.

"I'm *very* sure I don't, you quaint little girl!" answers her future husband, who is even roused out of his abnormal state of dreamy absent-mindedness, at the prospect of the completion of his happiness being so near.

"Very well, then, you must let me go back to Ireland at the end of this week and get my things ready, and then we can be married in a month's time from this, Ernest, if you like."

"What day, dear? Say some date that I may believe you really mean it."

"Indeed I mean it, Ernest. Very well, I will say the twentieth of next month; will that do?"

"Perfectly. I'm not likely to find fault with it. And now tell me, where would you like to go for your honeymoon, little woman?"

"Oh! I don't care a bit, I'll leave all that to you. You know so much more about travelling than I do," says Lil, — and the unconcerned tone and calm carelessness of the girl's manner,

unconsciously tell a tale sad and apparent enough to any one less unworldly than the dreamy student and his unsophisticated child-bride!

Heartily is the new arrangement approved of by old Lady Connistoun and her eldest son, who are only too anxious to call Lil "daughter" and "sister" as speedily as possible. And she is allowed to hurry back to Ireland undeterred, that she may forthwith prepare that extraordinary quantity of habiliments and garments of every description which appear to be part of the matrimonial service in the minds of all serious and well-brought-up young women; and also, to listen obediently to the words of wisdom which fall from her father's lawyer concerning those pro-

saic but necessary articles—"settlements," which as it happened were in this case a simple matter enough; as, owing to her father's state of intellect, the will he had made years before in his daughter's favour had come into force now (under certain restrictions), and Lillis Fane was virtually mistress of the River House and all other property belonging to him.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Time turns the old days to derision,
Our loves into corpses or wives;
And marriage, and death, and division,
Make barren our lives."

DOLORES.

CHAPTER VIII.

DIVIDED.

THE twentieth of March broke sadly and gloomily upon the world of the great metropolis—its foggy, raw atmosphere most unpleasantly mixed with a sort of driving sleet of rain and snow combined. It taxed even the patience of a London crowd to wait long outside a church-door on a morning such as this; but still a few women and one or two street boys waited on patiently outside the door of St. G—'s in the hope that their patience might in

time be duly rewarded by that exhilarating sight to the lower orders—a smart wedding.

The red cloth laid down on the church steps promised well. So did the appearance of those who occupied the large string of carriages which now began to arrive. For the friends and relatives of the house of Craven had assembled in full force to do honour to the marriage of the second son of that house, in default of seeing any chance of assisting at a like ceremony where his elder brother was concerned. To many it seemed strange, and to the softer-hearted beings amongst them almost sad, that whereas the bridegroom could number friends and relations without end there present, the little childish bride had no one soul of her own kith

and kin by her, nor any single friend to wish her even "God speed!"

The front pews facing the chancel, and the chancel itself, are all filled with the wedding-guests, and in the body of the church are scattered many casual lookers-on, such as no wedding in a town ever was without. High up in one of the pews of the gallery overhead, and almost concealed by a huge stone pillar reaching from the floor to the vaulted roof of the church, stands a man whose restless, anxious watch on all things taking place before his eyes, seems to speak of some far deeper interest than mere idle curiosity having brought him there. It is Neal Trench, who had been in Italy when he first heard that Lord Ernest Craven's marriage would take place

earlier than expected, and who has travelled day and night to be here in time now!

Sad and worn enough looks the handsome dark face, but there is a look of stern resolution on it such as declares that the spirit within may have been sadly bent but cannot be broken! Haggard and worn and ill as he looks, there is something almost grand in Neal Trench's face as he steels himself resolutely to look on at the wrecking of all his hopes of happiness on earth, and the loss of the one only love his wild reckless nature has ever bowed before.

Can it be true, he thinks half shudderingly to himself, that he is standing there to see "the child" married, this dark March morning? That it is his own little

darling, whose face he sees in dreams each night and which haunts him during every hour of the day, whom he will presently see standing before the altar in her white bridal dress, to take the solemn vows that will bind her to another man as long as they both shall live! Incessant travelling and want of rest have told on even Neal Trench's iron frame, and he feels a sort of stunned bewilderment over all things in his mind, which he cannot shake off.

Hark! the great organ begins to play the Wedding March, and there is a rustling and a hum of expectancy all over the church, as every eye turns towards the door awaiting the appearance of the bride. Neal's heart gives a wild throb as he recognizes Lord Connistoun advancing slowly up the middle aisle,—and leaning

on his arm a little golden-haired vision all in white.

A sudden flash of memory brings before Neal's mind his own words, spoken to Lillis Fane the night of the ball at Corraghmore, when the thought had struck him of how lovely she would be dressed as a bride, and when he had told her she "looked perfect in all white." "Ay! perfect enough!" he thinks sadly, as his eyes follow her whilst she advances to the altar and takes her stand before it, —and "all white" in very truth! White is the beautiful bridal dress and veil, and like flakes of snow are the flowers artistically scattered over it,—but whiter than all is the face of the bride!

And yet she neither weeps nor trembles, as is the way of ordinary brides on

their wedding morn; happy maidens who are leaving their sunny childhood's home behind them for ever, and yet whose tears have a certain joy almost as much as sorrow in them, for they are content so to do.

Lillis Fane stands before the altar erect and calm, with her little head thrown proudly and defiantly back as if daring herself to show any sign of weakness; but her mouth has a stern set look, which harmonizes badly with the extreme youth of her face, and her great grey eyes have a sad and almost *farouche* expression in them, such as one sees in those of some hunted animal at bay.

The service begins; and whereas the bridegroom looks nervous enough, and fidgets the wedding-ring about in his fin-

gers to an extent which makes its dropping bodily on to the floor only a question of time, the bride listens unmovedly and scarcely stirs. Once she glances at Lord Connistoun's face as he stands beside her, and almost smiles at the alarming solemnity of his usually cheery face, which at this moment wears an expression more befitting a funeral than a marriage feast. And, in sooth, good reason has "Con" to look far from jovial at this moment, for it has just come home to him that at this very hour of 11.30, the Grasshire hounds are just about settling down to their first fox, from the small but famous covert of Deepthorns, near which they are advertised to meet this day; and ruefully does "Con" speculate on the fact that they are quite sure to run over the cream of their country,

and have *the* gallop of the season, just because he is not there!

Clear and unfaltering ring out the words of the bride, as she swears to cleave only to him who stands beside her until the vow shall be cancelled by death alone; and the first ray of sunshine that has been seen on her face for many a day breaks forth at the cheery congratulation of her brother-in-law when he wishes her joy at the conclusion of the service, and adds in a low voice:

"Ernest looks more like other men in this work-a-day world already, Lil, just from sheer happiness!"

But as she turns to leave the altar, some unknown power impels her to lift her eyes to the gallery over-head, and pale as she looked before she turns paler yet as

she recognizes the dark haggard face that is looking down on her, and meets the hopeless, despairing look in the deep grey eyes she knows so well! With a desperate effort the girl tries to control the deadly faintness that is creeping over her mind and body, and though, when told to sign "Lillis Fane" in the matrimonial register, she stares vacantly as if she had never heard that name before, still her singular self-command and indomitable pride enable her to smile and talk, and to accept the congratulations which pour in from every side, with all apparent gaiety and happiness of heart. Only once again does she involuntarily glance up at the gallery over-head, and gives a sigh of relief at seeing that it is empty and untenanted by any living soul.

All through the trying ordeal of that unwholesomest and most wearisome meal—a wedding-breakfast,—and all through the preparations for her subsequent departure, the bride's spirits never flag; and brightly and gaily she bows to all the numerous well-wishers who stand up glass in hand to pledge "the bride and bridegroom," with three hearty cheers.

The best of impressions does the "little wild Irish girl" leave behind her on all the new circle of friends and relations, whose faces all look so unknown and strange to her; and when she comes down afterwards in her pretty travelling-dress of darkest brown velvet, and shakes hands with all the servants standing in a row ready to wish her joy, and thanks them for their kind wishes, no bride's face

ever looked brighter and happier than does that of Ernest Craven's young wife.

And if she has no relatives of her own to bewail themselves over her loss, that fact is amply compensated for by the unceasing flow of tears which good old Lady Connistoun has shed the whole livelong morning from sheer joy. Copiously did she weep down the front of her pew during the service in church, and hysterically has she sobbed all through the most would-be mirthful speeches at the wedding-breakfast, and now she has subsided on to a quiet sofa in the inner drawing-room of Lord Connistoun's small but comfortable town house (where the last scene of the marriage festivity has taken place), and is perfectly deluged in

floods of tears, which burst out anew at every fresh word spoken in praise of her beloved, newly-gained daughter.

At last all partings are over, all good-byes are said, and the carriage doors are peremptorily shut by Lord Connistoun, with the reminder that they've only just time enough to catch the Continental train at Victoria Station, (an admonition which causes the bride's head to remain anxiously stuck out of window most of the way, in order to judge of their rate of progression,) and Lord and Lady Ernest Craven are fairly started upon their wedding-tour.



CHAPTER IX.

"I shall never be friends again with roses;
I shall loathe sweet tunes, where a note grown strong
Relents and recoils, and climbs and closes,
As a wave of the sea turned back by song.
There are sounds where the soul's delight takes fire,
Face to face with its own desire;
A delight that rebels, a desire that reposes,—
I shall hate sweet music my whole life long."

THE TRIUMPH OF TIME.

CHAPTER IX.

THE "BLUE DANUBE."

 HOUGH the hour was four o'clock in the afternoon of a July day, the sun was shining still hotly down on the large gardens adjoining that most comfortable of hotels —the "Englischer Hof" at Naseweis-am-Rhein. In spite of the heat, however, the walks and alleys of the said gardens were crowded with that heterogeneous mass of humanity which can only be seen to perfection congregated together at a fashionable watering-place on the Conti-

nent. Representatives of every country and every trade were assembled there, and the confusion of tongues brought to mind that tower of old, at the building of which were confounded all the languages on earth.

There were some few confounded on this hot afternoon in the gardens of the "Englischer Hof" also; and on the stone terrace, outside the large *salle-à-manger* of the hotel, were scattered groups sitting at each little round table, and talking, arguing, and vociferating in all the languages of Europe, with a strong flavour of the American accent audible over everything else.

Out of the open window of a large airy sitting-room on the second floor, and looking into the gardens, leant a young

girl with arms crossed on the window-sill, listlessly watching the ever-changing forms, faces, and scenes, which pass before her in the crowd below. Lady Ernest Craven is somewhat puzzled how to dispose of the next hour, till it shall be cool enough to go for the usual drive to some ruin of convent or castle, such as it is *de rigueur* for all well-brought-up young couples to do when enjoying their wedding tour. Not even the strains of the "Tausend und Eine Nacht," which the band in the gardens is at this moment playing as only a German band *in* Germany can play, have power to remove the disconsolate expression from her face; and the Lady Ernest, after yawning sufficiently to dislocate her jaws, finally rouses herself to turn round and address a

remark to the only other occupant of the before-mentioned sitting-room.

"Ernest! do leave that horrid book and come and look at the people. It's so dull doing it by oneself!"

"In one minute, Lil," answers her husband, devouring the last few lines of a treatise on the comparative power of the four elements, which he has been fortunate enough to pick up during one of his morning walks abroad.

"What is there to look at?" he continues, pulling his chair close up to the window and lighting a cigar, with a view to consoling his spirit for its untimely separation from its beloved books.

"Oh! there's lots to see, Ernest, if you only keep your eyes open. Why there's more to study in that group of

faces on those chairs nearest to us than in a hundred books!" says Lil, nodding her head as she speaks towards several people of a better type of visitor than were most of those by whom they were surrounded. And yet the men were there chiefly to avoid notoriety, the women to gain it.

"Look at that fat, respectable-looking British paterfamilias, Ernest, sitting on the third chair from the end. I've been watching him—the old sinner—and you should see the way he has been making up to that golden-haired female in pink sitting next to him! He's just bought such a lovely bouquet from that little girl with the flower-basket, and has given it to her. I do hope that the materfamilias is looking at him from some top window, for

I dare say she only let him go out to buy a newspaper!"

"Let's give him the benefit of the doubt, Lil, and vote him a bachelor."

"No! I'm sure he isn't; quite sure! He's got such a look of being in the enjoyment of stolen sweets on his fat old face! People generally look bored over any pleasures that are quite legitimate, Ernest. Look at the difference between the expression on that good little boy's face on the left, listening to the music, sitting by his mamma's side and dressed in his best clothes, to that on the face of the ragged little gamin sitting on the grass behind him, who has already had two free fights with the liveried authorities of the garden in asserting his right

to listen to a band which is only intended for the amusement of his betters. That good little boy who has a right to be there doesn't enjoy it half as much as does the wicked little boy, who hasn't!"

"Do you apply that view to every pleasure in life, Lil?" answers Ernest Craven, laughing.

"No, not altogether, my dear boy. But I'm trying to learn the world, you see. *You* learn it from books, but I want to learn it by observing the ways of my fellow-creatures. Don't sit there dreaming, Ernest, for I want you to tell me what our plans are after we return to our native shores next week?"

"Well, it's no use staying in London,

Lil, for it'll be August by then, and there won't be a soul in it you know."

"But couldn't we stay there even a week, Ernest? Just to do St. Paul's, and the Monument, and the Tower?"

"My dear Lil!" exclaims her husband in a tone of mild expostulation.

"Well, but I've never seen them, and I ought to; oughtn't I?"

"There's no necessity for it that I'm aware of. Many people who always live in London even have never seen them, so I think you can afford to wait till next spring without compromising your taste for sights, little girl!"

"Very well, Ernest. Then we shall go straight to Ireland I suppose?"

"Yes, I think so; don't you? And as the Corraghmores have asked us for the

12th, it seems to me we had better accept that invitation from the O'Connors which I received yesterday, asking us to go to them on the 8th. They're only about thirty miles from Corraghmore, so it would be no trouble, would it?"

"Not a bit; and they've been so kind too in begging me to have 'Kittane' sent over for myself to ride on the long expeditions which they talk of. I wonder if she will be half as pleased to see me again as I shall be to see her!"

"It was certainly very kind of young O'Connor to tell you to bring her. By the way, isn't he to come of age that week too?"

"So he said in his letter. That'll be rather fun, Ernest, won't it! For they're sure to have big dinners, and perhaps even a ball!"

And Lady Ernest's eyes begin to dance at the prospect which still possesses all the charm of unsatiety to her heart.

"Ernest," she inquires in an awe-struck tone, "do you think I had better wear those diamonds which you and Con gave me, if there *is* a ball?"

"Of course you must. It'll be your first appearance in your own part of the world as a bride, and you ought to do honour to the occasion."

His wife's thoughts have left the diamonds, and are busy with the past. They have flown back to the ball at Corraghmore, nearly a year ago now; and she almost starts when, by some strange coincidence, the band in the garden suddenly begins to play a valse, and the beautiful notes of the "Blue Danube" come pealing

in at the open window. The brightness dies out of her face, a dreamy look comes into her eyes, and the present, with all belonging to it, is fading out of her sight. The garden before her and its crowd of faces passes dimly away into the far distance, and even the old paterfamilias, whose little peccadilloes have been the source of so much amusement and speculation to her for the last hour, gets up from his chair and walks away with the lady in pink on his arm, without attracting so much as one look from the sad wistful grey eyes.

But Lil Craven has not determined to let the past be past for nothing; and her strong, free, resolute nature enables her always to conquer those "dark hours" by which every soul on earth is assailed at

times, and which can so often bow down the weak even to the ground.

"Look, Ernest!" she exclaims, with her own gay, ringing laugh,—"do look at the 'shandrydan' they are bringing round to the side door of the hotel, and which we are to 'take the air' in! It's got a green body and red wheels, and there's a cream-coloured beast on the off side and a skewbald on the other! Well, if that quiet turn-out isn't enough to sink 'les Anglais' in any decent person's estimation I should like to know what is! and yet I'm sure we're guiltless of having selected it! It's too bad to give us a thing like a circus-carriage to drive out in, Ernest!"

"My dear Lil, we can't help taking what they like to give us in the way of carriages and horses at an hotel!"

"Yes, but we can tell them we don't like it! Oh dear! I wish I knew anything of French or German! Here, waiter!" she calls, seeing one of the black-clothed officials of the hotel passing by the half-open door of their sitting-room, who obeys her summons more from instinct than comprehension, and stands to attention, twisting his napkin into tortuous shapes.

"Waiter, pourquoi nous avons un carriage,—I mean carrosse,—avec des circus chevaux?"

"Comment, Madame?"

"Voilà ces chevaux!" resumes the Lady Ernest indignantly, pointing out of window, her French by no means keeping pace with her just wrath. "Il y a un qui a le nez *pink*,—et l'autre, au near side, est

tout rouge et blanc comme un—un petit cochon, no!—Ernest, what's French for a guinea-pig?"

"I don't know," answers her husband laughing, whilst the polite waiter, in the belief that it is nervousness which is prompting "Milady" to this vehement expostulation at sight of the horses prepared for her, keeps assuring her "qu'ils sont très forts, très doux," thereby driving her to the verge of utter exasperation. But as there appears to be no remedy to the fact that either behind those parti-coloured horses, and in that green carriage with red wheels, Lady Ernest must take her drive or else stay at home, she bows to the necessity graciously, and sitting beside her husband in solemn pomp, is driven off

triumphantly with as many "hoop-la's" and cracks of the whip as are assuredly quite sufficient to justify her statement that it was a machine attached to a circus which had been selected for them.

A week later Lord Ernest and his wife returned to England, and after a day's rest in London, proceeded straight to the north of Ireland, with the intention of paying their previously-arranged visit to Drummore, the grand old home of the O'Connors; and where, a few days later on, the last representative of that time-honoured name was to hold high revelry by night and day, in honour of having attained his majority and arrived at years of discretion.



CHAPTER X.

"Non, ma jeunesse n'est pas morte,
Il n'est pas mort ton souvenir."

SCÈNES DE LA VIE DE BOHÈME.

CHAPTER X.

DRUMMORE.

AGAIN it is August in the north of Ireland. The heathery mountains shine all purple and gold in the rays of the setting sun, and the old castle of Kilcorran seems lit up as if by fire where the red glow of sunset is streaming upon it. It lights up also the little white River House down in the valley below, and shines brightly into the dazzled eyes of the poor old imbecile there, as he sits on the lawn in front of it, and holds out his hands towards the

brightness as if he would grasp its rays, laughing gleefully the while like a little child.

The click of the gate as it opens and closes again makes him look round, and a shrinking look of terror and dislike comes over his face, which the presence of a stranger invariably brings there.

"I'm Neal Trench, Mr. Fane," says the new-comer in a kind, cheery tone, holding out his hand to the old man,—"your neighbour at Kilcorran, do you remember? I'm only here for a day or two on my way out to America again, and came just to see how you were."

The poor old man peered up into Neal's face as he surrendered, more than gave, his hand to him, and whispered:

"You've not come to take me away, have you? They took Jack first, and then my girl, and it'll be my turn next!"

"No, no, I'm only come to ask how you are getting on alone. You must miss your daughter, I think."

"Ay, my girl, my girl! She went away like Jack; she went to find poor Jack, I think. But they have never come back, either of them. You haven't seen them anywhere, have you?"

"No, I haven't," answers Neal soothingly. "But your daughter will soon come back again I feel sure."

"Ay, will she? That's what I hear them say at night. If I could only get out then I know I could find her. They come whispering to me in the dark, and sometimes I hear her singing when the

Rhua is rushing along after a storm, and she calls me so loud sometimes; but Robarts tells me to go to sleep again, and won't let me out!"

"Oh! no, you couldn't go out in the night, of course. Robarts is quite right."

"Is he? But I want my girl,—oh! I do so want my girl!" and the old man sobs childishly, as he rocks himself backwards and forwards in his chair,—whilst Mr. Trench stands looking at him sadly, feeling that in his own heart also is even a greater void than in that of the desolate old man's; and he turns slowly away to continue his walk homewards.

On the table in the big oak hall of Kilcorran lays a note for the master of the house, who takes it up carelessly and

wanders out on to the terrace, where he opens and reads it:

"*Drummore,*
"*August 7th.*

"DEAR TRENCH,

"I HEAR from a friend of mine that you came over in the same boat as himself, two days ago. We're in the middle of a most festive week here in honour of my having arrived at years of discretion; and though it's almost too late to ask you, I want you to come over to-morrow and stay here, as our winding-up dance is to-morrow night.

"We've the Corraghmores and all your old friends in the house, and the Ernest Cravens. The bride is charming. One of Corraghmore's servants will leave this

note at Kilcorran, but don't trouble to answer it, as there's a spare room ready for you. Only mind come.

"Yours ever,

"T. O'Connor."

Long did Neal Trench sit on the wall of the old terrace staring dreamily at the hills far away, now darkening rapidly as the neutral tints and shadows of evening took the place of the golden glory of sunset.

To see her once more, to hear her voice and to touch her hand, ay! the temptation was too great to be resisted. Go to Drummore he must!

The next day, just as he was starting on his long thirty miles' drive, Mr. Trench was detained by his agent,

Malone, who came to give him warning that the river, being at high flood owing to late rains, was threatening a certain cabin, which with its adjacent cowshed had been built too near its edge.

"An it's jist dhrowned the crathurs will be intoirely, Sorr, if the Rhua rises one foot more."

"Is there such a big flood then?" asked Neal in surprise.

"The biggest we've had for years, Sorr, an 'deed we don't know what to make of it. If it's jist from ordinary causes, it'll go down agin and sorra a bit of harrm it'll do at all at all. But if the Rhua rises as it's done before in back years, the Lord have marcy on our souls and bodies!"

"But those were extraordinary floods,

and quite unaccountable, from what I can make out," answered Neal. "There can hardly be any chance of those occurring now, I should think. Any way, Malone, make those Gormans leave their cabin for a day or two, and they can send their cattle up here if they like, tell them."

"I will, yer honner. I'll go at once. It's a saft day ye've got for yer journey, I'm afeared, Sorr," added Misther Malone, as a violent gust of wind came moaning up the valley, and the black clouds gathering on all sides seemed to give warning of deluges to come.

"It's a very soft day indeed!" thought Mr. Trench to himself, as in less than five minutes the rain began to pour down like a water-spout, and he turned up the collar of his great coat and made all necessary

preparations to ward off the elements as best he could. In crossing the bridge over the river he glanced down at the flood on each side of him. The Rhua well deserved its cognomen that day, for its turbulent, muddy waters were dyed of a deep red colour, and it seemed muttering angrily to itself as it swept and rolled along.

But a turn of the road hid it from view, and Neal had soon after quite enough to do to make head against the violence of the storm which came driving down the valley.

It was a weary, long thirty miles to Drummore, the wind and rain beating against them all the way; and Mr. Trench arrived at length at his destination, only to find that dinner was already half over, it having been put at an earlier hour in

consequence of the dining-room being required later on as a ball-room. However, a careful toilette, and an excellent though hurried dinner in his host's smoking-room, had restored him speedily to happiness and comfort of body, but it was with some trepidation of mind that he followed the latter individual into the large drawing-room, where all the guests staying in the house were assembled to wait for those who were coming later to the dance.

A glance round the room told him instantly that the one face he sought was not present then; and it was with a great sense of momentary relief that he exchanged greetings with Lady Corraghmore and the many old friends whom he encountered on every side.

Some one suggested beguiling the time which they might have to wait with a song; and with one accord came a general inquiry: "Where's Lady Ernest? won't she sing us something?" followed by the exclamation: "Oh! here she is! Do come and sing that song of yours "In the Gloaming;" will you, Lady Ernest?"

Neal turns his head and sees Lillis Craven advancing down the room, in a white dress trimmed with deep violet velvet, (she had carried out her resolution never to wear "all white" again,)—with diamond stars on neck and breast and in her hair,—and in her eyes the same odd, scared, "hunted" look he had seen in them on her wedding-day, and which tell him plainer than words can tell that she knows of his presence there to-night.

But not a trace of nervousness is in her manner as she calmly shakes hands with him; and then, turning and walking straight to the piano, begins without further delay to sing the song asked for.

She gets through the first verse admirably, her glorious voice sounding clearer and sweeter than ever, but when she begins the last one it falters audibly. By a strong effort she succeeds in regaining her composure to all outward eyes, but the deep thrilling tone of intense pain which is plainly to be discerned in her voice makes her listeners almost shiver as they listen to the words:

"In the gloaming, oh! my darling, when the lights
are dim and low,
And the quiet shadows falling softly come and softly
go,

When the winds are sobbing faintly with a gentle unknown woe,—
Will you think of me and love me, as you did once long ago?

* * * * *

"In the gloaming, oh! my darling, think not bitterly of me!
Though I passed away in silence, left you lonely, set you free;
For my heart was crushed with longing, what had been could never be:
It was best to leave you thus, dear—best for you, and best for me." *

Neal feels his heart almost breaking at sound of the pain in the sweet, childish voice; but he has come to help and not to hinder her in life's rough way, and he forces himself to talk to her gaily and naturally whilst she stands by the piano putting on her gloves, after the song is over, until the scared, nervous look leaves

* Arranged by A. Fortescue Harrison. Published by Hutchings and Romer, 9, Conduit Street.

her eyes, and once more the bright merry smile of past days lights up her face.

They only dance once together in the course of the evening, for the thrill that shakes Neal's very frame, as he takes the bride's hand in the quadrille with which the ball opens, teaches him not to try his strength harder than he can bear. By chance, the valse for which he comes to claim Lil as partner is once again the the old "Blue Danube"; and though each heart beats wildly, and to both its beautiful wailing notes bring back the unforgotten past, still they talk quietly and calmly, and neither of them shows by word or sign that they "remember."

"Where is your husband, Lil? I had hoped to make his acquaintance to-night?" asks Neal Trench, who, it must

be confessed, has in reality been cursing that absent young man vigorously and heartily the entire evening.

"He had to go back to England unexpectedly yesterday. There was some business his brother wanted him particularly for, and he doesn't like festivities much, so wasn't sorry to get away for a day or two."

"I am sorry, for I shan't see him at all, I fear. I'm off again to the west of America next Saturday."

"Are you? how I envy you!" says Lil earnestly, as the thought strikes her of how much easier it would be to face any distance or danger sooner than to sit quietly at home and *think!*

"How is 'Kittane'?" inquires Mr. Trench.

"Very well indeed. She is here at Drummore, too, and I've had two or three rides on her already this week." And for the first time that night Lady Ernest's bright face looks its old natural self once more.

"How you do worship that little mare, Lil!" and a half-jealous pang, of even an animal if loved by Lillis Craven, shoots through Neal Trench's saddened heart, and a wild desire rushes into it to carry her off then and there, far away with him alone, to keep her and to hold her in defiance of all the world.

But people's thoughts and wishes don't display themselves openly in good society, so he only suggests "one turn more," after which they go to the tea-room, an apartment situated at some little distance

from the room where the dancing is going on.

On their way down the passage which leads to it, one of the servants of the house comes forward to meet Mr. Trench, with the words:

"There is a man anxious to speak to you, Sir, as soon as possible. It's some one from your own place, I think, Sir."

"What the devil can be the matter?" mutters Neal, but catches sight of a weird, wet figure hiding behind the servant who had just spoken, and exclaims:

"Is that you, Dennis M'Carthy? What's the matter?"

"Deed it's jist meself, yer honner; least ways it's me soul, but me body's nigh perished wid the could an' the wather! The Rhua's risen, yer honner,

and Misther Malone sent me aff at oncest to tell ye that the whole town is nigh under wather, an' the sheep an' the cattle is drownin' under their very eyes, an' Gorman's house has been swept away with three of the childher sleepin' in it!"

"Good God! why I told Malone to make them leave it this very afternoon!"

"Deed an' I heard him say those very words, yer honour. 'But I'll wait till evenin', Misther Malone,' says Gorman, 'till we see if maybe the river goes down, says he. An' sorra a bit it went down,' but jist up an' up; an' at last they had to run for it, yer honner, carryin' three of the childher in their arms, an' before they could get back to fetch the other three the house itself was just swept away intoirely."

"How dreadful!" bursts out Lil Craven. "Oh! Neal, do start at once and go there; you're sure to be able to help the poor people."

"Of course I shall. Order my dog-cart round in ten minutes," he adds to the astonished servant waiting in the background. "Have you come all the way on foot, Dennis?"

"Deed no, yer honner. I got a lift in the post-cart for the first twelve miles or so, but it's bad travellin' to-night for man an' baste!"

"Well, I'll ask for something for you to eat, and then you can drive back with me. Only make haste about it, mind."

"Troth I will, yer honner." And Dennis shuffles off, the water dripping from his clothes as he walks in the wake

of the magnificent menial who convoys him to the back regions.

"Neal, isn't it dreadful about those poor children!" says Lil tearfully.

"Yes, terrible!—I only hope there will be no further loss of life, that's all;" and he thinks anxiously of Lil's own father, whose house is so near the treacherous Rhua too! Strange to say this fear has not yet entered the girl's mind, for, partly because of the distance of ground between the River House and the river itself, and partly because of the several careful watchers that guard the poor old man who lives within its walls, no thought of danger to its inmates crosses her mind for a moment. But still it is with a heavy heart, after saying good-night to Neal and returning to the ball-

room where the dancing is continuing fast and furious, (for it is scarcely midnight yet,) that she tries to resume the gaiety of before; and do what she will, Lil Craven cannot shut out from her thoughts the memory of the tragedy wrought by the Rhua that day, and an intense longing to be amongst her people in their hour of trouble and danger takes possession of her heart. Still she forces herself mechanically to dance and talk as the night wears slowly on, until a sudden fear makes her very heart stand still, as all in one moment the thought comes home to her that perhaps the River House itself is in danger! With an effort she commands herself sufficiently to walk quietly to the door, and once out in the cool passage outside she tries to think.

"Me Lady," says a voice close to her, "I've been waitin' an' waitin' these two hours an' more to see ye! Did ye know that the Rhua has risen? And Dennis McCarthy, who brought word of it to Misther Trench, says that the wather was already close up to the River House, when he looked back from the top of the hill at it!" and Pat Conolly's face is blanched with fear, as he pours forth his evil tidings with that zeal which the lower orders always display when they are the bearers of bad news.

Pale as death is Lil Craven's face as she turns to him, and says:

"Go to the stables at once. They're all up to-night so you can get into the harness-room easily enough. Get my saddle out of it and put it on 'Kittane,'

and bring her round to the little gate on the right-hand side of the stable-yard as quick as you can."

"But, me Lady, arrah! sure ye're not thinkin' of ridin' all that way at noight alone? It's thirty English miles, me Lady, and a wild bad noight!"

"Do as I tell you, Pat," says Lady Ernest peremptorily. "And mind you say no word to any one, but just wait at the little gate with the mare until I come."

"I will, an' ye tell me to, me Lady!" answers Pat Conolly ruefully, and returns upon his steps to obey his mistress's orders.

Meanwhile Lil Craven flies up-stairs, pulls off her dress and tears the diamonds out of her hair like one demented; and in

less than ten minutes is standing dressed in her little grey habit once more, looking like the Lil Fane of past years, who was sure to be the first to fly to the succour of her people when sickness or danger or death were thinning their ranks!

She wrote one hurried line to her hostess and laid it on the table, with a written message to her maid beside it, and then stole quietly out of the door, along the passage and down the back stairs, meeting no one on the way, and let herself out by a side-door into the yard.

The darkness of the night utterly bewildered her for a moment, and she was fain to grope along the wall, like a blind person, to find the little gate she had mentioned to Pat Conolly.

The wind and rain had ceased at last, and every now and then the moon shone out brightly enough, but only to be totally eclipsed the next moment by the masses of inky-black clouds that swept across it, like dark thoughts in a mind.

"Whisht, me Lady, is that yerself?" whispered Pat, in a mysterious voice that would have done credit to an arch-conspirator.

"Yes, all right, Pat," returned Lil in a low voice. "Bring the mare close to this big stone so that I can get on." And in another minute "Kittane" was walking away with her quick noiseless tramp, her mistress using every endeavour to keep the mare quiet so as to make no noise until out of reach of any listeners.

But there were too many people and horses astir at Drummore that night for there to be any cause for fear that the tramp of one of the latter should be especially remarked; and as Lil stole quietly down on the grass by the side of the drive, the only sounds she heard were those of the distant band in the ball-room dying away into the night.

CHAPTER XI.

"It is not much that a man can save
On the sands of life, in the straits of time,
Who swims in sight of the great third wave
That never a swimmer shall cross or climb.
Some waif washed up with the strays and spars
That ebb-tide shows to the shore and the stars;
Weed from the water, grass from a grave,
A broken blossom, a ruined rhyme."

THE TRIUMPH OF TIME.

CHAPTER XI.

"KITTANE'S" LAST FENCE.

WHEN once clear of the avenue of trees overhanging the drive, and having emerged out of the lodge-gate, Lady Ernest found it easy enough to see her road, for the wet condition of the latter caused it to shine out like a streak of silver in the semi-darkness. The stable clock of Drummore struck two as she rode through the gate, and turning her mare's head towards home she put her into as fast a hand gallop as she dared to do considering

the severity of the journey which lay before them.

The first fifteen miles were done well within the hour, for the road was level and good; but after that it crossed a mountainous tract of open moor, a more desolate scene than which could scarce have been imagined, and became rougher and more hilly each moment.

It was a wild, eerie night enough for any one to ride over a mountain road alone, but not a shadow of fear crossed Lil Craven's mind, and she was conscious of no feeling but one,—an intense longing only to be in sight of Shaughane once more. Carefully she nursed "Kittane's" strength as mile after mile went by,—sometimes slackening into a trot as the hills grew steep, and then urging her

along fast again as the way seemed to improve. The mare had long ago given up playing with her bit and shying at imaginary objects in the darkness as at first, and had settled down into a steady, striding gallop, that covered the ground rapidly. But more than twenty miles had been passed now, and though she was pulling hard and going free and well, the lather and foam on counter and flank shone white in the moonlight, telling its own tale.

The road wound up and up towards where the crest of the hill stood out dark against the sky, and "Kittane" laboured up it mile after mile, bravely but wearily, urged on by her rider with restless anxiety; for once at the top, the whole valley of the Rhua would lie before their

eyes. At last the crest of the hill is reached and passed, and Lady Ernest involuntarily checks her mare and surveys the scene which lies before her.

The day is dawning red in the east, and the far-off hills of Kilcorran stand out black and fierce against the sky, whilst even the old castle itself can almost be discerned rearing its head out of the darkness; and the pale soft light of dawn shining over all, gives a quiet and peaceful look to the valley.

Ay! but what is that awful sound which seems to make the listener's very heart stand still? Above the loud, painful sobbing of the weary mare, above the moaning, whistling wind and the cry of the scared curlew circling overhead, resounds the angry, terrible voice of the

Rhua as it speeds on its path of destruction. The huge body of water is hurrying along with a seething, roaring noise like that of some gigantic, murderous crowd crying out for blood, and many hundred yards on each side of the river are covered up and hidden from view in the sweep of that dark red flood.

"God grant the village and the River House are safe!" mutters Lil Craven to herself, as once more she urges forward "Kittane." But the thought strikes her suddenly that the bridges a few miles off at Shaughane may have been swept away, and all communication between the village and the River House be so cut off, whereas the bridge just below her is still standing, and without hesitation she turns her mare's head away from the direct road

to Shaughane which they had been pursuing, and gallops down towards it.

As they near the river, the roaring of the water becomes perfectly terrific, and the spray and the foam are dashing almost up to the parapets of the fine old bridge which is still so bravely defying their strength.

Strange objects seem to be whirled along in the flood as it tears in and out of the bridge's huge arches:—rafters, timbers, haystacks, trunks of trees, and even dead sheep and cattle are all swallowed up in one great, terrible, watery grave. As they gain the far side of the bridge, which from its extreme height is raised safely above the flood, "Kittane" shies at some white object floating slowly round and round in the back-water made by the

flood in the field just below the road. It is the body of some drowned bullock, and from the hill above can still be heard the frightened lowing of those of the herd who have escaped a similar fate.

Lil shudders as she sees it, and gallops on faster than before. Thirty miles lie behind them now, and even going this long way round can only make five more in all to do. It is four o'clock and past, and the morning is dawning bright and clear; whilst the golden glory far away in the east tells that the sun is about to rise, and already his pale consort, the moon, is slowly fading away before his overpowering brightness shall utterly eclipse hers.

The long night's work has told terribly on both horse and rider, for the mare,

though she gallops on at the same fast, unflagging pace, is labouring heavily and straining every nerve to do it, and Lil Craven's pale set face wears a look of weary exhaustion. Fatigue has almost unnerved her too; her head seems swimming round, and odd fancies rise up before her. The loud, continuous roar of the Rhua as it hurries along parallel to the road, and the sight of the flood-waves crested with foam, shining dark and red in the morning light as they roll and tumble over each other in their reckless onward course, all tend to confuse and bewilder her mind more and more, and strange thoughts begin to dance before her brain from very weakness.

What if that great red wave rushing down in the centre of the flood should

contain the body of some poor drowned soul! It may be that some shepherd or cattle-herd, in trying to save his flock, has given up his own life to the treacherous Rhua. And perhaps even now, in some desolate cabin on the mountain-side, is there weeping and wringing of hands for the "good man" who will never come back there again. What is that awful, wailing cry which seems to be drowning even the roar of the Rhua in her ears? It is the sad, terrible Irish "death keen," (which once heard can scarce be forgot,) and awed by some superstitious feeling, Lil Craven unconsciously watches the big dark-red wave with a shuddering fascination. It turns slowly over at last, and a dark object surges up in the midst of the foam, something narrow and long,

the shape of a human form. But as the day-light shines on it, it reveals itself as an uprooted gate-post; and it is with a deep sense of relief that Lil Craven hurries onward. Her old childish fears and superstitions concerning the "good people" return to her in full force, and more than once she fancies that small elfin forms are riding alongside of her and little shrill voices crying in her ear.

They are close to Shaughane now, so close that Lil can discern a crowd of people standing at the brink of the river on the far side of the latter. One glance shows her that her fears concerning the safety of the bridges had been well founded, for though the waters have not yet reached the River House itself, still

the large stone bridge leading to the village has been swept away and one arch and a few stray timbers are all that remain of the smaller wooden one, whilst between the village and the desolate house roars the mighty rushing Rhua.

Suddenly there arises a cry from the crowd of people standing on the opposite bank, and Lil Craven sees their arms uplifted in frantic warning—as a trembling, bent figure with long grey hair, totters slowly forward from the direction of the River House and advances towards the broken swaying bridge.

"Stop, father, stop!" cries out Lil in agony, but overwhelmed with fear at being left all alone in the midst of such a scene of desolation, the poor old man hurries on faster than before.

"Father, father, don't be frightened! I am coming!" rings out a despairing cry, as the one only chance left to save him flashes across his daughter's mind.

Resolutely she catches "Kittane" by the head and rides straight for the old "short cut," which she had so often ridden over in days gone by from sheer careless exuberance of spirits, — now it was to be done for life or death!

Those standing on the other side of the river recognize the black mare and her rider now, and a hoarse shout of warning breaks forth, for Neal Trench is standing in their midst, and sees the weary, labouring stride of the mare as she nears the formidable fence before her.

"Lil, Lil, for God's sake stop!" But the sound of his voice is lost in the river's

roar. He draws a deep breath and prays as he never prayed before that "Kittane" may refuse! But never in her life has the bonnie black mare been guilty of such a thing as that, and no shadow of turning is in her resolute brute spirit even now, wearied and spent though she be.

A vision crosses his mind of the last time he had seen "Kittane" and her little mistress ride at this very place in all their gay light-heartedness, but not now does "Kittane" play with her bit and throw her head about in wild mischief as of old, and no longer does her rider's merry laugh ring out on the air.

There is a moment of anxious suspense as the mare nears the fence, almost rolling in her stride from utter exhaustion; Lil Craven rouses her with might and main,

and with a desperate effort they clear it safely; but as "Kittane" lands into the field beyond it she staggers, falls heavily, and rolls dead on the grass, her brave heart broken under the strain at last!

An hour later, after Neal Trench has had time to go round by the nearest bridge that still remains standing untouched by the flood, he reaches the spot where poor "Kittane" has met her end, and on no sadder sight can the bright morning sun be shining down.

The old man, whose life has been saved at the sacrifice of her own, stands beside her body with a vacant, awe-struck expression, and whimpers ceaselessly: "I've found my girl, but not Jack, poor Jack!"

Lillis Craven is kneeling on the ground with her arms clasped tightly round the dead mare's neck, and the stony look of utter despair on her face betrays the strength of her deep love for the lost friend lying cold and stiff before her.

Never again will "Kittane" gallop over the mountain roads and bright green fields with her grand free stride; never more will she strain and pull at her bridle as the hounds come crashing out of covert, and every maddened horse is racing for a start; and in all the long years to come, the sound of her quick light tramp or her low soft neigh of recognition will never in this world gladden her mistress's heart again!

Unconscious of any observation save that of the poor old imbecile beside her, Lil Craven lays her cheek down on the dead mare's head, the golden hair mingling with the black, and a heart-broken cry of deep despair breaks from her:

"Oh! Kittane, Kittane! I wish I were lying there dead instead of you!"

CHAPTER XII.

"These many years since we began to be,
What have the gods done with us? what with me,
What with my love? They have shown me fates and fears,
Harsh springs, and fountains bitterer than the sea,
Grief a fixed star, and joy a vane that veers,
These many years."

RONDEL.

CHAPTER XII.

"CARN NA CUIMHNE."

(THE ROCK OF REMEMBRANCE.)

FOUR years have passed away, and the rays of a hot July sun are pouring fiercely down on the pavement of St. James' Street about two P. M. Some stray members of Poodle's Club are chatting languidly in the coolest corners of its large airy rooms, and the consumption of iced drinks is almost sufficient to break the Wenham Lake Company then and there. Two of the men assembled in its large bow window are old acquaintances, for the drawling

quiet tone of Beau Sabreur's voice mingles in striking contrast to the cheery ringing laugh of George, Lord Connistoun.

Both stop their conversation and look up, as a fresh element is added to the society in the shape of a tall, dark man, who stops a moment as he enters the doorway and surveys the scene before him, with the speculating look of curiosity natural to one who returns to his old haunts after some years of absence.

"Why! isn't that Twench?" asks Beau Sabreur in a low tone of his neighbour.

"Of course it is! How are you, Trench? Glad to see you back in England again, old fellow!" and "Con's" hand is laid in that of Neal's with hearty

welcome. The latter looks older, and more sunburnt and darker than ever now, but his usual *insouciance* of manner gives way before Lord Connistoun's kindly greeting, and all three men are soon indulging in a retrospective conversation concerning the events of the past three years, which to one of them at least contains many surprises. For excepting the first winter after Lillis Fane's marriage, during which he had taken up residence in the Midlands for the hunting season, Neal Trench has very rarely visited old England of late years, the greater portion of his time having been spent in the far-off countries whither his restless nature causes him to wander. Two years ago, when listlessly perusing an antiquated copy of the "Times," picked up by chance in the

Occidental Hotel at F—, he had come across a paragraph in the obituary therein which had altered the whole tenor of his life from that moment.

"On the fifteenth inst., at Craven Place, Grasshire, of rapid consumption, Ernest Launcelot Craven, second son of Edward, 7th Marquis of Connistoun, Aged 28."

Neither distance, nor change of scene, nor time itself, has ever for one moment driven his first and only love from out his heart; and the memory of the fearless grey eyes that looked so bravely and lovingly into his own, even whilst pronouncing their resolute sentence of utter separation, haunt him ceaselessly by night and day. Therefore it is with inward gratitude, though with outward *insouciance*,

that he accepts Lord Connistoun's pressing invitation.

"Come down to me for next week, will you? There'll only be the home party in the house, but Topthorne's going to judge his young hounds on Wednesday, and there's a day or two's local racing at the end of the week too, though I'm afraid that's not much in your line. You'll come too, Beau, won't you?" adds "Con" hospitably.

"I shall be delighted, my dear fellah," answers le Beau Sabreur, with more alacrity than he usually displays. "But I fear I can't get down before Thursday, because our Colonel has taken a widiculous idea into his head that the Household wegiments are to work as if they were ordinawy cavalwy! Quite an

exploded idea you know, my dear fellah!"

"Very much so!" laughs Lord Connistoun. "Very well, then we shall see you on Thursday anyhow," he adds, as Captain Sabreur takes up his hat, and after a loving glance as its immaculate complexion, places it carefully on his head at the most precisely becoming angle, and saunters slowly out at the door.

"Between ourselves, Trench, I fancy Sabreur is rather taken with my pretty little sister-in-law — poor Ernest's wife, you know;—and that's why I thought he'd like to come down to us," says Lord Connistoun confidentially.

"Indeed!" answers his companion coldly, his old jealousy of that amiable officer rising in full force once more.

"How is Lady Ernest?" he constrains himself to inquire civilly, though the very name, so long unspoken, sets his heart beating wildly.

"Oh! very well now, thank you," returns "Con." "She was terribly cut up at first of course, after my poor brother died, and her own father's death followed directly after. Ever since then she has lived entirely with us, and lately she seems brighter again and more like what she was when I first knew her."

"She's young enough yet!" observes Mr. Trench in a sort of soliloquy to himself.

"Ay, that she is, poor little girl, and she's the very light of my good old mother's eyes, I think. But you know her, don't you?"

"Yes, I knew her very well some years ago," answers Neal quietly, as both he and his companion prepare to depart on their separate ways, with many injunctions from Lord Connistoun to his friend as to the best train, station, etc., by which to arrive at Craven Place in the following week.

A feverish excitement takes possession of Neal Trench for the remaining days until the anxiously-awaited Monday comes, and even then, when it has come, and is half gone, and he finds himself, late in the afternoon, landed in safety at the little country station one mile from Craven Place, his heart fails him from some strange new nervousness, and he sends his luggage on in the dog-cart sent to meet him, and prepares to walk to the

house himself, taking a shady short cut through the park.

Before long he reaches a narrow path overhung with branches of trees, on each side of which runs a high grass-grown bank, and as he saunters slowly down it, his thoughts wander back to the years gone by, and once more he fancies himself back in the little wood on the hill under Kilcorran, whilst visions of a small pale face and a coil of golden hair rise up before him, and again he hears the old, well-known ringing laugh.

A loud squeak and a scuffle at the side of the path rouse him abruptly from his reverie, in time to see a weasel, in hot pursuit of a young rabbit, rush across it. The sight of a human being dismays both the spoiler and his prey; the rabbit

scuttles frantically into an adjacent hole with which he is acquainted, whilst the weasel runs up the side of the bank, but not before Mr. Trench has had time to send a well-directed stone after him. Needless to say, it misses the weasel, but grazes very near the head of some one coming quickly round the corner, and hitherto concealed by the high bank aforesaid.

"I beg your pardon a thousand times," exclaims Neal hastily, and then as he recognizes the little figure in black advancing towards him, all his ideas seem to be dancing a war-dance of defiance to general common-sense in his brain. Often has he pictured to himself, of late, this long-looked-for meeting with the only woman who has ever had any power over

his reckless soul, and many a time has he rehearsed imaginary conversations to himself for that very occasion, and decided in his own mind what he should say to her, and what she might perhaps answer. Now that the moment has arrived at last, all he can think of to say after exchanging polite greetings is the intelligent remark:

"What a hot day it has been!"

"Yes, it's extra hot, even for July," answers Lillis Craven, also pursuing the subject of the weather with unflagging interest.

"I think my train was late," continues Mr. Trench, feeling for the first time in his life almost shy, a feeling which by no means diminishes as he steals a glance at his companion's face, which

reveals to him a merry, mischievous look about the eyes and mouth, strangely like that of the little "wild Irish girl" he had made acquaintance with one August night in Kilcorran wood, so long ago. Women somehow, as a rule, generally keep their wits about them better on these sort of occasions than men do,—so Lady Ernest Craven quietly inspects her companion for a moment (not a line on the well-known face is overlooked in that short instant's scrutiny), and then remarks:

"Don't you think you had better say you are sorry for having so nearly hit me on the head just now?"

"Indeed I *am* sorry! It's very lucky I didn't do it quite. I should have felt it horribly if I'd hit you!"

"So should I," says Lady Ernest drily.

As they walk on towards the house, Neal Trench asks his companion whether she likes living in England.

"Oh! yes, I like it; chiefly, I think, because I feel of some use here now, for old Lady Connistoun would be so lonely without me. You see Con is out all day, and so she has no companion besides myself now, though she will have one soon, of course." And in answer to her companion's look of inquiry, she adds, "You know that my brother-in-law is going to be married at last, don't you?"

"No, I didn't know. I thought he looked as if he had some important piece

of news on his mind the other day? When is it to be?"

"In two months' time, I believe."

"And who is the lady?"

Lil hesitates for a moment, and then glances mischievously at her companion's face, as she answers:

"Janet Airlie."

But the look of real pleasure on the face of Miss Airlie's forsaken swain as he hears this piece of intelligence, and the honest tone of his voice when expressing his satisfaction thereat, completely convinces her that he is very far indeed from feeling any soreness on the subject of his having been succeeded in that lady's affections by Lord Connistoun.

"Of course I shall go to Ireland then, and live at the River House," continues

Lil, "though they are all very good in wanting me to stop here. But I won't do it, for you see they'll have Janet then and won't require me as much as they do now, and my heart is always going back to the 'ould counthry.' So as soon as the young people return from their wedding-tour I shall take my departure."

"Where will they go after they are married?"

"Somewhere abroad, but I don't think they've settled where yet."

"I mean to go to California for my wedding-tour," observes Mr. Trench, "and pass the first stages of that sentimental period of one's life in the wilds of the Yo Semite valley."

"Well, anyway it's a charmingly secluded locality for that sort of thing,"

laughs Lady Ernest. "There could only be an old cinnamon bear or two to play third party!"

"Yes, that's the best of it. When do you go to Ireland, Lil?"

"I am going over there the week after next for a few days, to prepare things for my final return there after Con is married. Do you remember old Robarts? He's still at the River House, taking care of it for me."

"Of course, I remember him well, and 'Shusy' too! Don't you recollect the day that I assisted at the inspection of your wardrobe, previous to your first dinner-party?"

"Yes, that I do!" laughs Lady Ernest, "nor have I forgotten that you procured the bit of white heather which

was the sole ornament that my costume could boast of on that same great occasion!"

"What changes there have been since then," says Mr. Trench dreamily, "and yet you are not the least bit altered, Lil, nor do you look much older, either."

"I shall be one-and-twenty next month, Neal; and sometimes I feel as if I were one-and-forty at least; and then again I sometimes feel as if it couldn't be true that I am one-and-twenty even! How old are you?"

"Seven-and-thirty, I regret to say."

"Yes, that's rather old, certainly," answers Lil Craven, "but you scarcely *look* that age," she adds re-assuringly.

"That doesn't much matter! I *feel*

thirty-seven, which is more to the purpose, I'm afraid."

"There's mother!" exclaims Lady Ernest, as, having crossed the path, they are drawing near the large grass-plot in front of the hall-door. "And she's wandering about in this hot sun, too, without an umbrella or anything. Come and make her acquaintance at once, Neal, she's the dearest old woman in the united kingdom!" and straightway her little Ladyship marches him up determinately to the quiet old lady, who is pacing gently about on the short, burnt-up grass of the lawn, and introduces them to each other summarily.

The name of Neal Trench brings no sort of remembrance to Lady Connistoun's

mind, but any one being a friend of her dearly-loved little daughter-in-law is very sure of the good old woman's kindliest welcome, and between the old young friend and the new old one, Mr. Trench has little cause to complain of his reception on arriving at Craven Place.



CHAPTER XIII.

"Ces amours mal enterrés, c'est toujours comme ça!"

SCÈNES DE LA VIE DE BOHÈME.

CHAPTER XIII.

"JE ME TOURNE VERS L'OCCIDENT."

"WHAT a bore it is to think that a lot of strange folk are coming to invade this place to-morrow!" observes Mr. Trench discontentedly, as Lady Ernest Craven and himself are sitting on garden-chairs in front of the hall door after dinner, about two days after his arrival.

It is one of those glorious moonlit summer evenings when perfect stillness seems to reign on earth and in heaven, and when even the song of a nightingale

in the low shrubs near the house seems almost too loud for the perfect, dreamy silence.

Lil Craven, whose thoughts have been wandering in the land of dreams for the last five minutes, starts slightly at the sound of his voice, and shaking off the feeling of depression which has crept over her, answers brightly:

"I don't think it's at all a bore! They're all nice people, and no strangers amongst them."

"Of course Janet Airlie is charming, but she will naturally be handed over entirely to Con's tender mercies, and there's only one young woman, of a certain age, coming besides. All the rest are men."

"Yes, of course the party will be more interesting to me than to you," observes Lil frankly.

"I suppose it's the old story! Women never *can* be happy without a pack of men to run about after them!" exclaims Mr. Trench, whose temper appears somewhat cantankerous on this peaceful summer evening.

"We can *get on* very well without what you call 'a pack of men' dancing attendance on us!" returns Lil indignantly. "Only it's more amusing when they do!"

"Just what I said, my dear child."

"Don't nag!"

"I'm *not* nagging!" and then the undignified nature of the accusation as

applied to a man and a gentleman strikes them both in the ludicrous point of view, and they laugh gaily, like two children.

Truth to tell, the vague hint dropped by Lord Connistoun, when speaking of Le Beau Sabreur on the previous Monday, has rankled somewhat in Mr. Trench's mind, and like most men who are seriously "hard hit," he sees a possible rival almost even in shadows.

"That was rather a young puppy I thought, that little De Vere who dined here last night," he remarks, knocking the ash off his cigar, "and you seemed to encourage his airs and graces a good deal, Lil. Do you want to turn the boy's head?"

"Hurt a child like that?" exclaims

Lady Ernest indignantly. "Why, I'd as soon give a kitten boiling milk to drink!"

"I'm glad you think so," answers Neal, somewhat mollified. "But I'm sure he thought he'd made an impression."

"That's of not much consequence, is it? Though I agree with you that he seems nearly as much puffed up with pride in himself as an aloe."

"Why an aloe?"

"Isn't that the creature that only flowers once in a hundred years? And when the time arrives, is so stuck up with what it's done that it dies of it? But what do you think of that Mr. Adolphus Vavasour in the Foreign Office who comes to-morrow? Isn't he supposed to be very good-looking?"

"Perhaps. He's a confounded snob."

"Well, you can't say much against Captain Sabreur any way, Neal? For he's certainly good-looking enough and a thorough gentleman."

"Oh! Sabreur's a very good fellow. But he's a conceited ass!"

Does the woman live who likes hearing any man abused whom she knows to care even the least little bit for herself? Let his short-comings be what they may, it is enough, if he like *her*, for that fact to cover a multitude of sins. Consequently, Lady Ernest Craven turns round decisively on her companion and says honestly:

"I like Captain Sabreur, Neal, and won't hear him abused, please. He has always been kind and nice to me, and one

ought to speak of people as one finds them, oughtn't one? But I'll let you abuse Mr. Vavasour as much as you like, because I don't know him, and if he isn't a gentleman I'm sure I shan't like him!"

"Very well, little one! I'm afraid I *am* in a beastly bad temper to-night for some unknown reason, but we'll leave the merits and demerits of the impending visitors alone, and I'll tell you a story on the subject of 'le bon sang ne peut mentir,' which tickled my fancy extremely at the time. The last winter that I was down here hunting, there was a day that one of our best jockeys was out too, a man who is as well known for his brilliant riding to hounds as he is for winning the great 'double event' when he steered the Lord of Lyonesse to

victory, or for the glorious but fatal struggle which sealed the fate of brave Dundee. On the occasion I speak of, C— was riding a little narrow thoroughbred beast that looked too light almost even to carry *him*, and some of the fortunate possessors of big weight-carrying hunters were commenting freely on the uselessness of regarding the former class of animal in the light of a horse fit for the shires. 'There's one thing in thoroughbred ones,' said C— quietly, 'that they'll *go on* under difficulties when your half-bred ones *won't;* and if ever you find yourself near the end of a run lying in a ditch with your horse on the top of you, too blown to get up, you may be pretty sure that his grandam's name was 'Smiler'!'"

"Yes, that's a first-rate idea," laughs Lil, "and might be applicable to more things than horses. Have you got 'St. Julien' still, by the by?"

"Oh yes. He's not as young as he was, I'm sorry to say, but is as sound as ever. So he ought to be, considering I've only hunted one season out of the last three. I sold all my horses except him when I went abroad the last time. Have you found anything to replace poor 'Kittane'?"

"I've had two or three horses that carried me well enough in their way, but nothing can ever replace 'Kittane' to me!" and tears fill the bright grey eyes at the very mention of her dead favourite's name.

"Do you see that old Pole Star over your head, Lil!" asks Mr. Trench, to turn the conversation. "When I was out in the Far West I used to get up quite a deep sentiment for that star. Many a time, lying at a camp-fire with my head on a saddle, have I stared up at it and wondered what scenes it was looking down on here in old England."

"Did you?" says Lil, dreamily. "Neal, I can't help thinking of two paragraphs which I saw in the 'Times' to-day. They seemed to have no connection with each other, and yet, knowing something of the story of both the man and the woman, it seems to me so awfully sad!"

"What were the paragraphs?"

"In the obituary column is stated the

fact of her death, late on a certain day; and in the little Court Circular is mentioned the name of the man as being 'in waiting' on her Majesty that very night! Can any torture be greater than what that man must have endured during all the weary hours of the long evening, when he knew that each moment of it was bringing death nearer and nearer to the one soul on earth he cared for?"

"Yes, it was sad enough! Poor beggar, I pity him most heartily!" and Neal shudders as he pictures what it would have been to himself to have stood in that man's place, and know that the love of his life lay dying!

"Lil, for Heaven's sake don't think of such dismal subjects, child! It's enough

to give one the blues for life. Tell me something about Ireland instead. How long is it since you saw old Mrs. Maguire?"

"Not for a long time, and then only for a minute one afternoon at the chapel. She asked me to go up to the castle and see her, but I didn't find time somehow."

"I'm glad you didn't. I don't want any one to introduce you to my mansion except my own self, Lil."

"Very well, I'll remember. And the next time that you are at Kilcorran, whilst I am at the River House, I shall expect you to give me five o'clock tea in return for the dinner I once gave you. I suppose it was rather forward of me to

give you some food that night, Neal, wasn't it?"

"Not a bit! There's a deal of cant talked about propriety now-a-days, but as far as my own experience goes it depends quite as much on the way a thing is done, as on what that thing is. Some women would get up an incipient flirtation over an offer of a plate of bread-and-butter, and others can be frank and kind *bon camarades*, and utterly above that sort of thing. Most men aren't fools enough not to see the difference pretty easily!"

There is a long pause, during which a belated thrush sings a little song of self-commiseration on an adjacent bush, and a rabbit hops out into the moon-light and

sits up solemnly with one ear forward and the other back.

"Lil," says Neal Trench at last, in not the steadiest of tones, but still loud enough to scare the said enterprising rabbit and to send him back abruptly to the bosom of his family, "I want you to promise me something?"

"I'll promise if I can, Neal."

"I have to leave here the day after to-morrow, as you know, and go to Kilcorran to settle some land disputes amongst the tenants; and, as you also will be at Shaughane in a very few days after, I want you to promise to meet me at the very spot in the little wood where we met for the first time, five years ago, and to answer me one question there. Will you?"

"Yes, I promise," answers Lady Ernest quietly, "if you'll tell me at what hour and on what day you wish me to come."

"It'll be August then, won't it? Just as it was at that time too! And I should like you to meet me there at the very same hour, about six o'clock, on the day after your arrival at the River House. Can you remember?"

"Yes, Neal."

"Now come into the house, dear, for it's getting too cold for you to sit out any longer, and I hear Con's voice resounding from the smoking-room, which shows that her Ladyship has retired to bed and left him all alone."

* * * * *

A fortnight later, and it is once more a glorious August evening, and the little wood under Kilcorran is all aglow in the golden rays of the setting sun. Slowly up the path leading from the village below comes a small slight figure, clad in black. As the shades of the trees close over her, she takes off her hat to smooth back the hair from off her little pale face, and, certes! not a day older looks the vision of to-day than did that of the gay-hearted child, Lillis Fane, this very time five years ago!

When Lady Ernest draws near the spot where she had then so rashly interfered to save its owner's property from destruction, she half smiles to herself at memory of the scene; and as she climbs the last

ascent towards where the old broken bench had stood, she becomes suddenly conscious of the fact that a new one stands there now, and that there lean against it a tall, dark figure, the memory of which has haunted her almost ever since that day itself.

"Lil, my darling, you must know what I want to ask you!" and Neal's deep grey eyes are looking into her very soul, and his strong arms draw her close to him, as if he would never let her escape from him again. Not that the Lady Ernest tries to solve that problem very much, for her head lies contentedly down on his broad breast, and she certainly makes no effort to restrain the passionate kisses which cover the small pale face,

until it seems almost to steal a passing ray of rosy red from the dying sunlight glimmering through the trees.

"You told me once before that you cared for me, darling, on that awful night at Corraghmore, when we were both half mad with misery! Tell it me now again, child, that I may realize the truth of it all, and know that you are really mine and that I am not dreaming!"

"It *is* true, Neal, that I love you with all my heart and soul."

The young voice rings out clearly and solemnly, and Neal Trench feels a purer and better man than he ever did in his life before, as he lays his dark head down on her little golden one, and says in a low tone of deep, passionate tenderness, "God

bless you, my little wife, now and for ever."

* * * * *

Two months later, the steamer which has made its coasting voyage up the Gulf of California from Panama is entering the Golden Gate of San Francisco. On her deck stand two well-known figures, Neal Trench and his wife, who have chosen to pass their honeymoon in the land of the Far West.

"Do you remember my dream long ago, Lil? When I dreamt that we were sailing in at this very Golden Gate, you and I alone, and all the world left far behind?"

"Yes, I remember!" and though the words are brief, Neal can read aright the

loyal truth in the fearless, frank grey eyes that look so lovingly into his, and both rest dreamily silent, and gaze in perfect, quiet happiness at the fast-approaching shores of that glorious land, the very dream of the Far West, golden California.

THE END.

CLAY AND TAYLOR, BUNGAY. S. & H.

